

Ilex glabra Inkberry, Gallberry¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

This upright, clump-forming, evergreen shrub is valued for its foliage and fruits. The lustrous, dark green leaves may have a few obtuse teeth toward the leaf apex or they may have entire margins. They are obovate to oblanceolate in shape and may reach a length of 3/4 to 2 inches. Gallberry becomes somewhat open with age and often loses its small lower branches. Female plants have berry-like, black drupes that occur from September to May of the following year. These 6- to 8-foot-tall plants are especially valuable to birds for their persistent fruits and branch structures. The flowers of *Ilex glabra* appear in May, and the staminate and pistillate flowers occur on separate plants. The female flowers are solitary, and the male flowers are borne on a stalk consisting of 3 or more flowers. Both sexes of flowers have creamy white petals and are inconspicuous.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ilex glabra*

Pronunciation: EYE-lecks GLAY-bruh

Common name(s): inkberry, gallberry

Family: Aquifoliaceae

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 10A (Fig. 1)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: reclamation plant; specimen; screen; foundation; mass planting

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

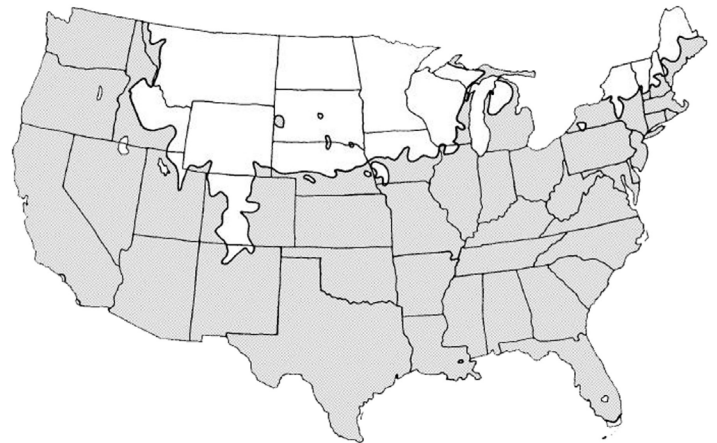


Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 6 to 8 feet

Spread: 8 to 10 feet

Plant habit: vase shape; oval

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

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Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristic: attracts birds; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Gallberry is excellent when used in mass plantings and as naturalizing material. It has been utilized as a hedge, foundation plant and accent plant. It makes a poor hedge because it thins toward the bottom.

Ilex glabra prefers a full sun to partial shade location in the landscape and moist, acidic soils; high-pH soils should be avoided. Older plants may be renewed by heavy pruning.

Cultivars include 'Compacta', dwarf female clone, tighter branching and foliage than species, grows 4 to 6 feet high, becomes leggy at base; 'Georgia Wine', turns burgundy during the winter; 'Ivory Queen' and 'Leucocarpa', white fruited forms, grow 6 to 8 feet high; 'Nigra', purplish foliage in winter; 'Nordic', compact rounded form, grows 3 to 4 feet tall, cold hardy, needs pruning to keep it dense; 'Shamrock', compact form, slower growing than species, leaves smaller and flat; 'Steed', compact form; 'Squat', compact form.

Propagate the gallberry by seed, layering, cuttings, and grafting.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Leaf spot, scales, and spittle bugs have been observed on this plant.