



Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata* sp.)

Through Ice and Snow...

The Holly (*Ilex* sp.) is an integral part of the winter landscape garden. It offers beauty year round. When winter tightens its icy grip, that's when this versatile plant really shines.

By David Dales

The Holly's *Glow*

Holly (*Ilex*) is a genus of about 400 species of flowering plants in the family Aquifoliaceae.¹ They are shrubs and trees that range from approximately 4 feet to a towering 80 feet. The Holly's range is quite vast and encompasses Asia, Europe, North Africa, and North and South America. The leaf structure can be either finely toothed or smooth in configuration. Hollies can be either deciduous (*drop their leaves*) or evergreen depending on the species. The fruit is a small berry, usually red when mature, with one to ten seeds. Although Holly berries are mildly toxic to humans, after the berries go through a series of frosts they soften and become an extremely important food for numerous species of birds, and also are eaten by other wild animals. During winter storms, birds often take refuge in hollies, which provide shelter and protection from predators. **Interesting Fact:** The wood from hollies is extremely hard and is used in various applications including white chess pieces and

inlay work in fine woodworking.

Hollies are prized in the garden because they are highly ornamental. Many of the varieties seen in the Delaware Valley are evergreen. Placement of hollies in the garden depends on the overall design scheme you are trying to achieve. For example, Blue Hollies (*Ilex x meseræ*), so named because of the bluish hue their foliage cast, are excellent for hedges. Place them in a row where you would like to achieve the hedge (i.e., under a window or along a walkway). When they are



American Holly (*Ilex opaca*) with splendid showing of berries contrasting against the snow.

first purchase from the garden center they will not appear compact, but don't be alarmed. With a hedge trimmer, cut them to the desired height and width at least twice a year, or when you see new growth protruding up. Within a year you will have the start of a beautiful

hedge. Other popular holly species are known as pyramidal shaped. This particular configuration is best used as a focal point. Two varieties that work best for this application are the Dragon Lady (*Ilex aquipernyi* 'Dragon Lady') and the Nellie R. Stevens (*Ilex x 'Nellie R. Stevens'* - cross between the English and the Chinese Holly). Place them in location where they can become the center of attention, as a way to add height and dimension to your landscape garden. During the winter months they are spectacular with their dark green foliage and brilliant red berries. They can also be used as a security system for your home. Because of their sharp foliage, hollies can be placed near windows to deter intruders.

The Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*) is a native species wetland plant that is blazing with color in the winter. Because it is deciduous, the bright red berries really put on a show after the leaves have fallen. This is especially evident after a snowfall with the wonderful contrast of the red on the white ice crystals. These hollies are best planted in staggered bunches for the best impact. One important factor to consider when planting the Winterberry Holly is to make sure you plant both a male and a female. The female will bear the berries. Ask your local nursery for proper species, male and female compatibility.

Hollies are a must for a well-balanced landscape garden. Their beautiful red berries seem to glow in the winter landscape. They are also a perfect refuge for birds that don't migrate in the winter such as the Cardinal and the Blue Jay. Hollies are also great for creating edges and adding depth and dimension to any landscape garden. Whether you choose a deciduous variety such as the Winterberry or select an evergreen species, it is hard to overlook the splendor of the hollies glowing through the backdrop of a winter wonderland.



Giant specimen Holly of a least 70 feet towers over the landscape

Wikipedia -The free encyclopedia

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