**Ilex glabra**

Edward F. Gilman

**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

**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
- **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

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**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  

**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, acid 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 then 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.