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Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Ilex verticillata: Winterberry[1]

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Introduction

Winterberry's bright red, persistent berries provide vibrant color in early winter after the leaves have fallen off. Plants in fruit appear to glow red.

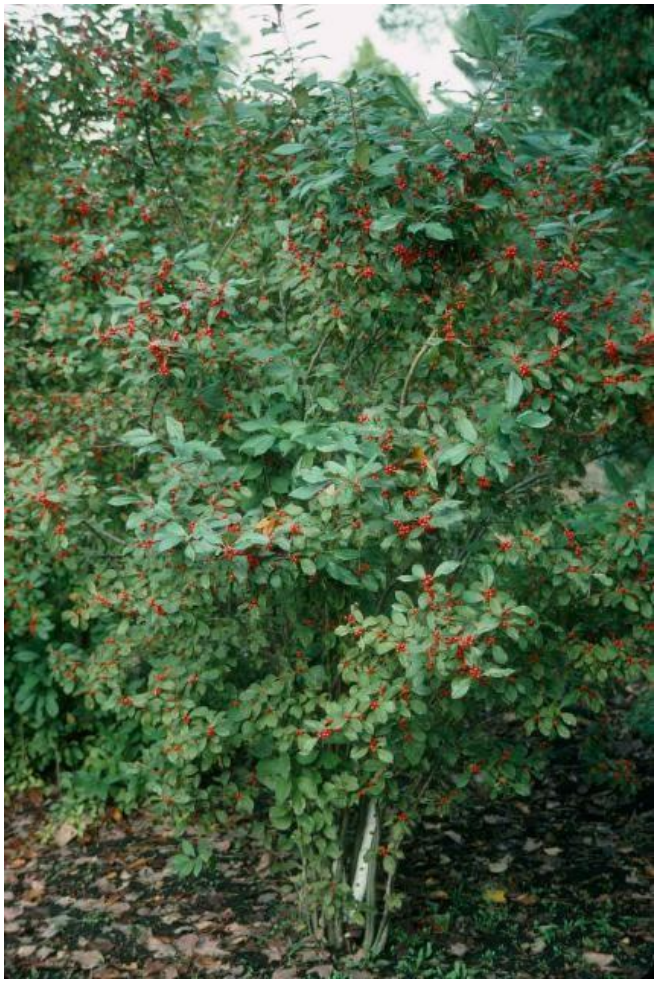

Figure 1. Middle-aged *Ilex verticillata*: Winterberry
Credit: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Ilex verticillata*

Pronunciation: EYE-lecks ver-tiss-sill-LAY-tuh

Common name(s): Winterberry

Family: *Aquifoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 4A through 8B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: container or planter; reclamation; specimen; highway median; Bonsai

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

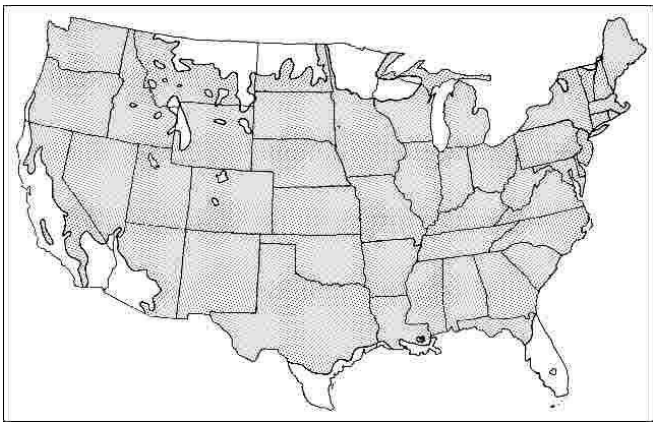

Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 6 to 10 feet

Spread: 5 to 10 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round, vase

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate, double serrate

Leaf shape: oblanceolate, elliptic (oval), obovate

Leaf venation: brachidodrome, pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

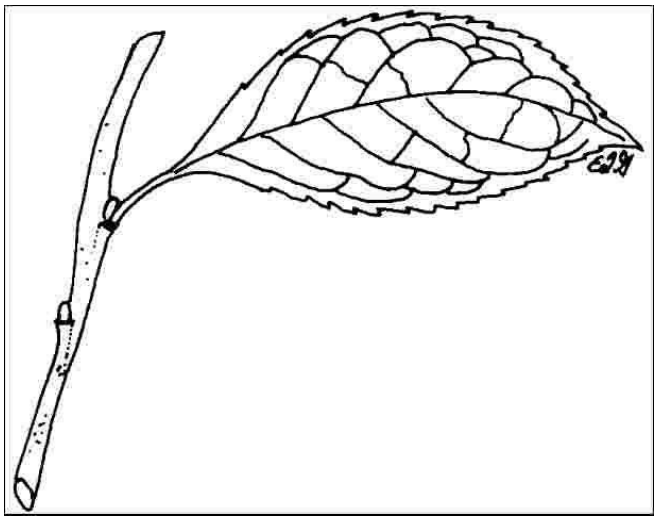

Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: sand; loam; clay; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

Use and Management

It grows 6 to 10 feet tall, spreads 5 to 10 feet on thin, multistemmed branches, and grows slowly. Branches and stems weep under the weight of the foliage and berries creating a graceful, vase-shaped symmetrical canopy. Young plants are somewhat irregularly shaped. Winterberry is dioecious, so both male and female plants are needed for fruit production. The fruits of this native are often eaten by birds.

Use it in a shrub border or landscape as a specimen, or any other area to attract birds. When planted in turf as a specimen, be sure to keep the soil under the canopy mulched so weeping stems and branches can droop to display the nice form. If turf is allowed to grow beneath the crown, it will thin due to the dense shade and low branches will interfere with mowing equipment. Little

pruning is needed if the plant is properly located to allow for its spread. The plant grows in sun or partial shade in a rich, well-drained, acid soil, though it tolerates swampy areas. Its tolerance to wet soil makes this a useful plant in poorly-drained landscapes. It is not drought-tolerant.

Cultivars include: `Afterglow' - bright red berries and a heavy fruit set; `Chrysocarpa' - yellow fruits; `Fastigiata' - narrow, upright; `Nana' - 3 1/2 feet tall, large fruits; `Winter Red' - dense branching, dark foliage, heavy fruit production.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are serious.

[1] This document is ENH468, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication. © UF/IFAS. This publication is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/.*

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