

HOLLIES OFFER WIDE RANGE WITH BRIGHT FOLIAGE, FRUIT

By DOUGLAS CHAPMAN

Shrub forms of holly may fill a unique niche in the landscape. Three species which are under-used but may be of significant value for not only the Northeast but also throughout the Midwest include Japanese Holly, Inkberry, and Michigan Holly. They show good tolerance to urban conditions and should be tried.

Japanese Holly (*Ilex crenata*) is an extremely dense, twiggy shrub which is somewhat rounded with a height and spread of 6 to 10 ft. The leaf is oblong to round, slightly thicker than boxwood but a dark lustrous, almost blue-green. Its year-round rich dark green color makes it particularly effective as a hedge planting, a specimen, or in mass plantings for large area landscapes. Japanese Holly will grow well in sun or shade but prefers sites protected from March's southwest sun and wind. The soil should be a well-drained loamy sand. Disease and insect problems are almost insignificant with leaf miner causing some blemish. Don Wyman reports that Japanese Holly and Inkberry have great potential as they are extremely tolerant of urban conditions, e.g. air pollution. The only way to purchase Japanese Holly is to know the cultivars and see which one fits your climatic conditions.

I. crenata 'Convexa' is one of the hardiest forms. It has a somewhat vase-like to upright mounding habit, reaching 8 to 10 ft. in height with an ultimate spread of 10 to 12 ft. Its dark green shiny leaves are almost waxy-like. 'Black Beauty' Japanese Holly, a selection by Girard Nursery, Geneva, Ohio, is noted for its compact habit, dark green leaves, and its ability to take heavy pruning. It should be noted that all *I. crenatas*, including the species, take well to formal and/or



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heavy pruning. Dirr suggests that 'Black Beauty' is the hardiest of all Japanese Holly. 'Green Island' Japanese Holly is a slow growing, low spreading form with bright, almost lime-green foliage. It is somewhat open, being considerably broader than tall and reaching almost 3 to 4 ft. in height.

Inkberry (*I. glabra*) is an extremely hardy native ilex. It prefers a sandy or organic-sandy soil with an acid pH (5.0-6.0). Inkberry is native from Nova Scotia to Florida. It must be stressed that provenance plays an important role in the hardiness of this plant; therefore, if you are in the northern area, purchase only from nurseries that are growing plants from northern seed sources or cuttings of same. Inkberry's habit is an upright oval, reaching 6 to 8 feet in height. The mature leaves are a dull green with the new growth being somewhat lime-green in color. When young, this

upright branching habit requires little pruning but as it matures, it becomes open, almost leggy. Therefore, this evergreen requires either frequent pruning or total pruning. The ¼-inch black fruit is not particularly effective but does add some interest in the landscape. Although there are several selections of *I. glabra*, in Central Michigan we feel the straight species is most adaptive. In woody landscape large areas or homes, this shrub is great as a specimen.

Michigan Holly (*I. verticillata*) is perfectly hardy throughout Zone 3. It is a native to Michigan. *I. verticillata* prefers swampy, high organic, wet soils. Its rather twiggy, dense habit makes it outstanding in mass use, for commercial or high-

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way plantings, or in naturalized settings for the home landscape. It reaches 7 to 10 feet in height. The foliage is a deep rich green in the summer, becoming a lustrous black after freezing. This deciduous holly could be selected for its outstanding brilliant red fruit which is about ¼-inch in diameter. This red fruit is effective in the landscape from August through January and becomes a secondary fruit for birds—an added bonus in an otherwise dreary northern winter. Davidson at Michigan State University has done some work with Michigan Holly and finds its fruit outstanding. He feels it is exceptional not only for home landscapes but institutions as well. The insect and disease problems are minimal with powdery mildew being significant but not catastrophic.

The blue hollies or X *Meserveae*, *I. aquifolium* and *I. rugosa*, have been reported to do well in sun or shade, adapting well to a wide range of soil conditions while showing good tolerance to winter

burn. One blue holly that has been reported by Orton as hardiest in the northern area is 'Blue Girl.' 'Blue Prince,' a male form, is a good pollenizer for those of Meserve or blue hollies. It has dark shiny green foliage with no berries, reaching 15-ft. 'Blue Princess' is a smaller plant, being somewhat oval, reaching 12-ft. in height. It has dark glossy blue-green foliage and is reported to have a good heavy fruit set. These are probably the hardiest of the blue hollies. 'Blue Angel,' one that seems not to be hardy in northern areas, is somewhat slow-growing and compact with a height of 6 to 8 ft. It has glossy blue-green summer foliage with a purple-green winter foliage. The fruit is a brilliant scarlet.

When considering northern areas, such as Central Michigan, 'Blue Prince' and 'Blue Princess' have shown hardiness even in this most recent severe winter but we have only had two year's experience with these hybrids. At this point in time, we would certainly

suggest trying the blue hollies but stress that landscape architects or horticulturists experiment with the plant in this area first. These plants propagate quite readily and, therefore, are becoming familiar in the nursery trade. These may prove to be some of the most exciting introductions. But only time and your trial will provide this information.

The shrub hollies should be used more efficiently. The natives range from deciduous (Michigan Holly) to evergreen (Inkberry) with foliage color and fruit being outstanding characteristics. Wyman reports that the Japanese Holly and Inkberry thrive in urban conditions. When looking for variety in the landscape, let's try hollies, from the natives to the blue hollies—a chance for diversity and excitement. **WTT**



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