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Ilex glabra 'Compacta'

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Common Name: inkberry

Type: Broadleaf evergreen

Family: Aquifoliaceae

Zone: 4 to 9

Height: 3.00 to 4.00 feet

Spread: 4.00 to 6.00 feet

Bloom Time: May to June

Bloom Description: White

Sun: Full sun to part shade

Water: Medium to wet

Maintenance: Low

Suggested Use: Hedge, Rain Garden

Flower: Insignificant

Leaf: Evergreen

Attracts: Birds

Fruit: Showy

Other: Winter Interest

Tolerate: Rabbit, Deer, Erosion, Wet Soil, Air Pollution

[Garden locations](#)


Culture

Easily grown in average, medium to wet soils in full sun to part shade. Adaptable to both light and heavy soils. Tolerates wet soils. Prefers rich, consistently moist, acidic soils in full sun. Good shade tolerance, however. Avoid neutral to alkaline soils. Inkberries are dioecious (separate male and female plants). Female plants need a male pollinator in order to produce the berry-like drupes that are characteristic of the species and cultivars. Prune to shape in early spring just before new growth begins. Plants generally need minimal pruning unless used as a hedge (perhaps best grown as an informal hedge). Remove root suckers regularly if colonial spread is not desired.

'Compacta' is a female cultivar and needs a male pollinator in order to produce the jet black berries.

Noteworthy Characteristics

Ilex glabra, commonly called inkberry or gallberry, is a slow-growing, upright-rounded, stoloniferous, broadleaf evergreen shrub in the holly family. It typically matures to 5-8' tall, and can spread by root suckers to form colonies. It is native to the coastal plain from Nova Scotia to Florida to Louisiana where it is most commonly found in sandy woods and peripheries of swamps and bogs. Spineless, flat, ovate to elliptic, glossy, dark green leaves (to 1.5" long) have smooth margins with several marginal teeth near the apex. Leaves usually remain attractive in winter unless temperatures dip well below zero. Greenish white flowers (male in cymes and female in cymes or single) appear in spring, but are relatively inconspicuous. If pollinated, female flowers give way to pea-sized, jet black, berry-like drupes (inkberries to 3/8" diameter) which mature in early fall and persist throughout winter to early spring unless consumed by local bird populations. Gallberry honey is a highly-rated honey that results from bees feeding on inkberry flowers. This honey is locally produced in certain parts of the Southeastern U.S. in areas where beekeepers release bees from late April to early June to coincide with inkberry flowering time. Dried and roasted inkberry leaves were first used by Native Americans to brew a black tea-like drink, hence the sometimes used common name of Appalachian tea for this shrub.

Genus name comes from the Latin name *Quercus ilex* for holm oak in reference to the foliage similarities (holm oak and many of the shrubs in the genus *Ilex* have evergreen leaves).

Specific epithet means smooth in reference to plant leaf surfaces.

'Compacta' is an evergreen, stoloniferous, slow-growing, compact shrub with a tight, oval to rounded habit, and typically grows 3-4' tall and 4-6' wide. Thick, spineless, dark green leaves fade to olive green in winter.

Problems

No serious insect or disease problems. Leaf spot is an occasional problem. Spider mites may appear, especially in dry conditions. Susceptible to chlorosis (yellowing of leaves) in high pH (alkaline) soils.

Garden Uses

Mass or group. Excellent for shrub borders, foundation plantings or as a low hedge. Also effective naturalized in moist woodland gardens or in moist locations near streams or ponds. This species is noted for its ability to perform well in wet sites.



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