



Ilex verticillata Winterberry¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Winterberry's bright red, persistent berries provide vibrant color in early winter after the leaves have fallen off (Fig. 1). Plants in fruit appear to glow red.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Ilex verticillata*

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

Common name(s): Winterberry

Family: *Aquifoliaceae*

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

Origin: native to North America

Uses: Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 6 to 10 feet

Spread: 5 to 10 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

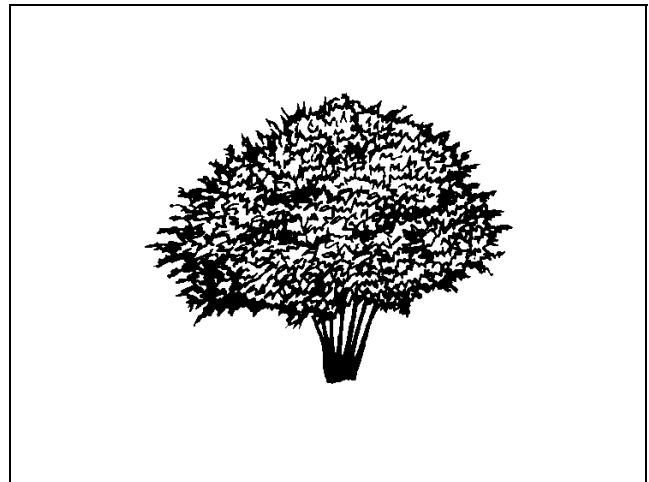


Figure 1. Middle-aged Winterberry.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: double serrate; serrate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); oblanceolate; obovate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

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

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-309, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

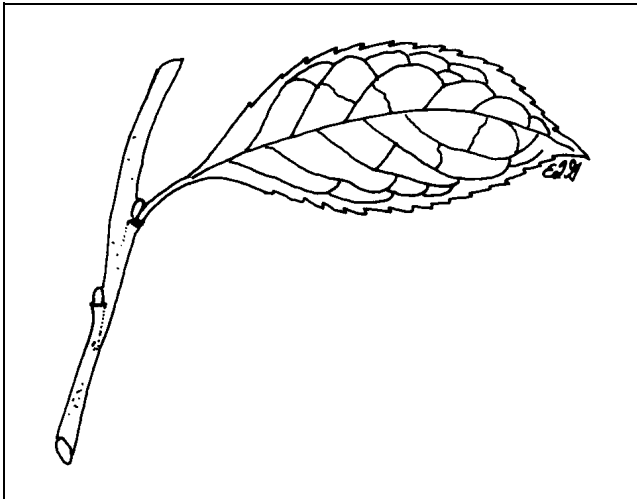


Figure 3. Foliage of Winterberry.

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.