



Township of Bernards Shade Tree Commission

1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

email: shadetree@bernards.org

Website: http://www.bernards.org/boards_commissions/shade_tree/default.aspx

The Tree Hollies (*Ilex sp.*)

This group of hollies are the ones that adorn Christmas cards and holiday decorations of all sorts. They are tall conical evergreen trees covered with red berries in the wintertime. Their images along with those of the conifers speak to winter snow scenes. In former times holly branches were harvested from the forests routinely and sold with branches of other evergreen plants. Tree hollies range in height from about 10 feet to as high as 50 feet and vary in width from 10-20 feet. They flower in the early spring and the flowers are small and white to greenish white. Flowers are pollinated by a variety of insects. Almost all of this type of holly require a male pollinator. Green fruit is formed during the season and becomes red lasting through most of the winter. Eventually the berries are eaten by birds.

Generally this group of hollies is slow growing and the branching is very dense resulting in a good nesting place for birds. The leaves of most hollies are very spiny and have a dark green color. Some crosses are less spiny and rather box shaped when bred with a species having a smoother shaped leaf.

‘Dan Fenton’ is outstanding cultivar of the American holly (*Ilex opaca*) that is native to New Jersey and other eastern coastal states. It was introduced by Dr. Orton of Rutgers University. It grows slowly and naturally attains a dense conical shape. The leaves are very dark green and lustrous. It is cold hardy and tolerates some shade. It, along with other hollies in this discussion, are not tolerant of windy locations.

‘Meshick’, developed by Mrs. Meserve, is a smaller tree derived from a cross of European holly with *Ilex perado*, the Canary Island holly. It grows to 15-20 feet high and only 4 to 6 feet wide. The leaves are just a little larger than one inch and are very glossy. The smaller size makes it more appropriate for more intimate gardens with limited space.

'Nellie R. Stevens' is a cross between the European holly and the Chinese holly, *Ilex cornuta*. This plant has many attractive features including dense branching, very dark green leaves, and is fast growing. Height is 15 – 25 feet and width 8 -12 feet. It is self-pollinating according to some references.

All of the above hollies have great ornamental value but are sometimes disappointing in the landscape. All require excellent pollination; otherwise there won't be good berry set. This may be traced to not having a suitable pollinator close enough or possibly the lack of insect pollinators.