

## My Favorite Hollies

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I'm a lazy gardener, and I'm proud. I look for plants that can take care of themselves because it's likely I will forget at some point, to water, feed or pamper them.

Do you want to know which plant tops my list? How about one that requires little care, is mostly pest and disease free, tolerates a wide range of soil and water conditions, provides something good to look at year 'round, is salt tolerant, and attractive to wildlife and evergreen. We're talking Ilex. The good ol' holly is the lazy gardener's dream. And there are 13 different native species of Ilex that are found in Florida.

Hollies have few requirements other than giving them a good start at planting. Once established, they are quite drought tolerant, and don't need heavy feeding or pruning. They prefer slightly acid soil, but will do fine in alkaline soils. Due to the wide range of cultivars now available, you can easily find a holly that fits your landscape needs for size and shape. Consider hollies for foundation plantings, specimen shrubs or trees, or hedges.

It's important to do your homework before buying. Common names can be confusing with so many varieties on the market, so this is one of those times when a little Latin will help out. The following is a list of my current favorites.

*Ilex vomitoria*: Native Americans used to drink the juice from the berries of this plant for purging during "black drink" ceremonies, hence the species name, *vomitoria*. You shouldn't have any trouble remembering the Latin on this one. The common name is Yaupon Holly and there are some very interesting cultivars available. The native yaupon tends to be scrubby-looking. It's a large shrub that grows well in poor soils and can handle dry or wet conditions. If you want something a little more interesting, consider these cultivars:



'Pendula'- also called Weeping Yaupon. Grows to about 20 feet, with a distinct, weeping shape. Females have red berries in the winter. 'Will Fleming' - while this guy has a great look initially, and gets taller than many other yaupons, it tends to lose its columnar shape over time.

'Nana' - a dwarf variety, Nana is good as a foundation planting in groups or rows.

*Ilex crenata*. Crenate means having rounded teeth around the margin. 'Helleri' - while this cultivar does not normally bear fruit or flowers, its small, compact shape makes it a great foundation plant in the landscape. This shrub grows 2-4 feet tall and 5 feet wide. Well-drained, slightly acid soils. 'Sky Pencil' - a very dense, columnar plant. It grows to about 10 feet tall and only 2 feet wide. It has black berries that are difficult to see with the dense green foliage. 'Sky Pencil' maintains its shape well and is therefore an attractive alternative to 'Will Fleming'. A perfect accent plant.



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*Ilex cassine*, Dahoon Holly - this is a wonderful specimen tree, especially if you have low areas that tend to stay wet during the rainy season. Dahoons are found growing all throughout Florida. A little larger than the Yaupons, they grow to about 45 feet and bear brilliant red berries in the winter. If you want to see some fantastic Dahoons at their winter best, drive down to St. Marks and check them out along the main road in the refuge.

Whatever your landscape need, there is sure to be an Ilex for you. Just don't drink the juice.

*\*Valerie Weeks is a Master Gardener with the UF-IFAS Extensions in Leon and Wakulla Counties and an employee of Just Fruits and Exotics Nursery in Medart. Photos by Valerie Weeks: Dahoon holly, Ilex vomitoria 'Pendula', and Ilex crenata 'Sky Pencil'*

[\[Back\]](#)