

# Gallberry

(*Ilex glabra*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Gallberry is an evergreen shrub to small tree found in flatwoods, bayheads, coastal swales, bogs, sinks and moist woodlands throughout Florida. Its tiny flowers attract bees, while its pulpy berries and evergreen foliage provide food and cover for birds.

Gallberry's flowers are greenish-white with four to six rounded petals surrounding a bright green superior ovary. They are born in leaf axils either as single flowers (female) or in cymes (male or female). Leaves are ovate to elliptic, glossy and dark green with pale green undersides. They are alternately arranged. Leaf margins are thick and may be entire, but are typically finely toothed with notched apices. Fruits are shiny black berries containing three to five nutlets.



Photo by Mary Keim

Native Americans dried, roasted and steeped the leaves to make a black tea, giving the plant another common name: Appalachian tea. Honeybees feed on the flowers and produce a unique honey that is slow to crystallize due to its high pollen and enzyme content.

*Ilex* is the only living genus in the Aquifoliaceae family.

**Family:** Aquifoliaceae (Holly family)

**Native range:** Nearly throughout

To see where natural populations of Gallberry have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zones 8A–10B

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist to dry, acidic, sandy soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade

**Growth habit:** 6–10+’ tall

**Propagation:** Division, seed

**Garden tips:** Gallberry is clonal, spreading by underground rhizomes. It can be pruned to a desired shape, making it suitable for a screen or hedge planting. It also works well as a specimen plant or as part of a naturalistic landscape. It can tolerate short periods of drought. The plant sometimes develops leaf spot, especially during the wet season, but it is generally not a problem. Infected leaves may drop early. Gallberry is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers are born on separate plants. Plants of both sexes are required if berries are desired. Seeds may experience a period of dormancy.

**Caution:** Cultivars have been developed from plants found far north of Florida. These typically do not perform well in our state and will have only one sex.

Gallberry plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.