

Aquifoliaceae

holly family

All woody plants, the hollies and relatives have simple alternate leaves, which are sometimes toothed. Flowers are regular and they may be perfect or unisexual. Usually axillary, they may be 4–8-merous. Petals are connate at the base or separate. The stamens alternate with the petals and may be attached to the base of the corolla. Fruits are drupes, one stone per carpel, although some may abort. Of the three genera, only one reaches Nova Scotia. Fruit is not edible and may cause illness.

Key to species

- A. Leaves entire on margins, smooth; petals linear or oblong, distinct; *Ilex mucronata*
stamens free and distinct; pedicels long and slender.
- aa. Leaves toothed, sometimes only at the apex; pubescent or smooth; **B**
petals ovate, connate at the base, short obovate lobes; stamens adherent to
corolla tube; pedicels short.
- B. Leaves evergreen, apex toothed, glabrous and shining; fruit black. *Ilex glabra*
 bb. Leaves deciduous and rugose; thin; fruit red. *I. verticillata*

Ilex L. Holly

Cosmopolitan in range, hollies number between 300–400 species. Plants are dioecious. Flowers are axillary and generally white. Some species have perfect flowers, but remain functionally unisexual, with rudimentary organs. Small calyx is persistent in fruit. Berries are black or orange-red.

Ilex glabra (L.) Gray Inkberry; houx glabre



Photo by Sean Blaney

It is a shrub bearing noticeably shiny oblanceolate leaves. They are marked at the apices with several blunt teeth. Young twigs may be hirsute. Flowers are arranged in clusters, their petals connate at the base, subtended by smooth lobed calyx. Fruit is shiny black.

Flowers later, in August.



Photo by Martin Thomas

Found in a variety of habitats on rocky barrens, in swamps and dense conifer stands.

Common but local in Digby around to Shelburne counties. Infrequent along the Atlantic coast to Louisbourg.

Ranges along the coastal plain from FL to LA, north to ME, MA and NS.

***Ilex mucronata* (L.) M. Powell, Savol. & S. Andrews
(=*Nemopanthus mucronatus* (L.) Loes.**

False Holly; némopante mucroné



Photo by Sean Blaney

Generally a smooth shrub bearing narrowly lanceolate or oblanceolate leaves, which are thin and glaucous beneath. Small solitary flowers produce a reddish or yellow berry. Stamens are not adherent to the distinct petals. Sepals are absent. Flowers are 4–5-merous. Fruit is a succulent reddish or yellow berry, borne on filiform pedicels. Not edible.

Flowers May and June.

Acidic soil or peat in wet woods, bog margins and even hollows on barrens.

Common throughout.

Also ranges from NF to ON, south to IL and MD.

***Ilex verticillata* (L.) Gray**

Canada Holly; Winterberry; houx verticillé



Photo by David Mazerolle



Photo by Ross Hall

A common shrub, it has elliptic or oblanceolate leaves, variable in thickness, but not evergreen. Dull and often rugose over the veins, their petioles are densely pubescent. Stems are smooth. One or two flowers arise from the leaf axils, subtended by ciliate sepals. Fruit is a red berry. Formerly separated into several varieties, no longer recognized.

Flowers earlier than the previous species, in mid-July.

Rocky barrens, headlands, edges of lakes, swampy woods and a variety of other habitats.

Common throughout the province.

Eastern, from NF to ON, south to TX and FL.