



# *Ilex verticillata* Winterberry<sup>1</sup>

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## 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

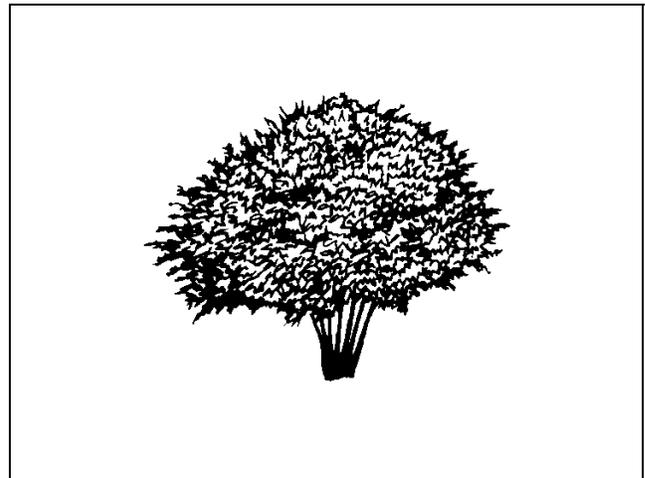


Figure 1. Middle-aged Winterberry.

## 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

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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

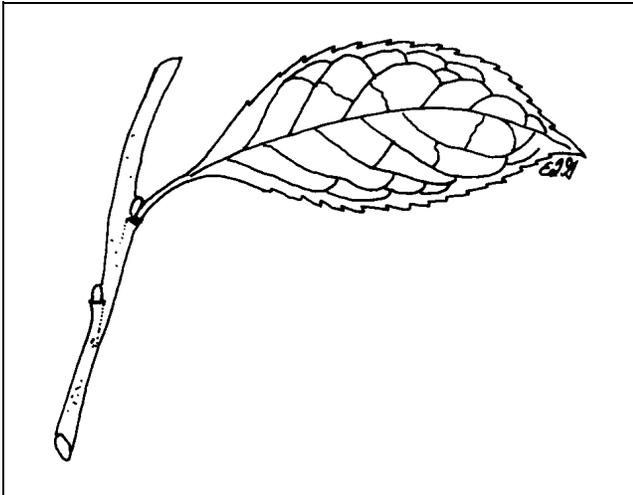
**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns  
**Pruning 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.