**Ilex x ‘Nellie R. Stevens’**  
‘Nellie R. Stevens’ Holly

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**INTRODUCTION**

A hybrid between *Ilex aquifolium* and *Ilex cornuta*, Nellie R (Fig. 1). Stevens Holly has kept the best traits of both parents, with lustrous, dark green leaves and abundant fruit production. Leaves are among the darkest of any plant. Vigorous and fast-growing, this Holly quickly grows into an attractive, broad pyramidal-shaped evergreen, 20 to 30 feet high and 10 to 12 feet wide. It will need a male Holly nearby to ensure pollination and production of the vivid red berries. Chinese Holly, *Ilex cornuta* will flower at the proper time and may be used for this purpose.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Ilex x ‘Nellie R. Stevens’  
**Pronunciation:** EYE-licks  
**Common name(s):** ‘Nellie R. Stevens’ Holly  
**Family:** Aquifoliaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 6 through 9 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; Christmas tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range
DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet  
Spread: 10 to 15 feet  
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms  
Crown shape: oval; pyramidal; upright  
Crown density: dense  
Growth rate: medium  
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire; pectinate; spiny  
Leaf shape: oblong  
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 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

Fruit

Fruit shape: round  
Fruit length: < .5 inch  
Fruit covering: fleshy  
Fruit color: red  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; 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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
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

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Nellie R. Stevens Holly is one of the best Hollies for the warmer regions of the country, and is ideally-suited for use as a screen or border. It maintains a nice, uniform shape without pruning. It is now becoming widely available and is one of the best plants for making a screen due to its very dense, symmetrical habit. Locate it where it will have enough space to spread since trees become wide at the base. Lower branches can be removed to create a clear trunk for planting along a walk or near a patio, but the tree really shines as a specimen or screen allowed to develop with all branches intact to the ground. Nursery operators grow the tree either as a multi-stemmed clump or with one central leader. Multi-stemmed trees may not hold up in ice storms as well as those with a central leader. Main branches on single-leadered trees are usually well-secured to the trunk, making the tree sturdy and a permanent fixture for almost any landscape.

Nellie R. Stevens Holly should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, slightly acid soil. Plants are drought-resistant once established.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern, perhaps scale on occasion.