
Wildflower Spot – February 2017

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

INKBERRY

Ilex glabra

By Helen Hamilton, past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS

When conditions are too wet for most non-native evergreens, our native Inkberry will thrive. This useful shrub is long-lived, slow-growing, and fine-textured – all characteristics that make it desirable for formal hedges in traditional gardens. But it is also invaluable as screening and as winter bird food in more natural landscapes. When it gets lots of sun, it will become dense without shearing or pruning. Inkberry can tolerate part shade, but in the wild whenever the forest canopy gets multilayered and dense, inkberry dwindles away and dies.

This evergreen holly produces black fruits in the summer which persist over the winter, furnishing food for many birds, including bluebird, brown thrasher, hermit thrush, bobwhite, and wild turkey. The leaves are without prickles, usually blunt-tipped with a few wavy-edged teeth above the middle.

An attractive landscape plant, Inkberry grows only to ten feet, and can colonize to furnish an

effective screen. Inkberry prefers acid, sandy soil, near a wet source. Companion plants are blueberry, winterberry, wax myrtle; nearby pine trees can furnish the necessary acid soil conditions.

Inkberry grows in bogs and wet woods of the coastal plain from Nova Scotia to Florida and west to Louisiana. In Virginia it is found primarily in the southeastern counties. This mound-shaped shrub is an attractive alternative to non-native invasive plants such as privets and heavenly bamboo. ❖



Photo: Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) taken by Jan Newton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.