

Gallberry

(*Ilex glabra*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Gallberry is an evergreen shrub found in flatwoods, coastal swales, bogs, sinks, moist woodlands, and bayhead edges 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 and 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 bluntly toothed with notched apices. Fruits are shiny black berries containing five to eight nutlets.

Native Americans dried, roasted and steeped the leaves to make a black tea, giving the plant another common name: Appalachian tea. (It does not contain caffeine.) Honeybees feed on the flowers and produce a unique honey that is slow to crystallize because of its high pollen and enzyme content.

Family: Aquifoliaceae (Holly family)

Native range: Throughout Florida, excluding the Keys

To see where natural populations of Gallberry have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to dry, acidic, sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 6–10+’ tall

Propagation: Division, seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: North, Central, South

Garden tips: Gallberry is clonal, spreading by underground rhizomes; however, it moves slowly and is easily controlled. 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.

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 available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.



Photo by Mary Keim

SCAN FOR FULL
PLANT PROFILE:

