

ECOQUEST

December 2020

HOME for the HollyDays



American holly, *Ilex opaca*

Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora's December EcoQuest is **Home for the HollyDays!** Holly trees are attractive natives that have become symbols of the winter holidays. Hollies are one of the few trees found in all fifty states, with several species native to Sarasota and Manatee counties. Hollies are dioecious, meaning that trees bear either male or female flowers, but not both. The female trees bear beautiful berries. While they are toxic to humans, the berries are an excellent food source for birds and mammals in the winter. Many insects pollinate the flowers and the dense foliage of the trees is excellent for wildlife.

The leaves of some holly trees can be made into tea. The Yaupon holly is the most caffeinated plant in the United States. Native Americans used the leaves for medicinal and ceremonial purposes, making a black drink. Because these ceremonies involved vomiting (likely due to fasting and consuming large quantities of caffeine), Scottish botanist William Aiton named it *Ilex vomitoria* in 1789. When moderately consumed, it does not actually cause vomiting, and you can now purchase Yaupon holly tea commercially! In addition to teas, one of our native hollies, *Ilex glabra*, (also known as gallberry and inkberry), provides us with delicious honey from its nectar.

This December, enjoy being Home for the HollyDays, while helping us document our beautiful hollies!

WHAT IS AN ECOQUEST?

EcoQuests, part of the [Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Project](#), challenge Floridians to become engaged citizens in the observation, study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and fauna of Florida, and understand the impacts to it by exotic species.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

1. Download the easy-to-use iNaturalist app on your mobile device, or visit [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) on your computer.
2. Set up a user account or sign in to join projects and submit observations.
3. Visit the [Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Home for the HollyDays](#) project and click "join" on the upper right.
4. Photograph plants anywhere in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. Take multiple photos to show important features for identification (overall plant, leaves, flowers, fruit, stem).
5. Post your observations to iNaturalist.
6. Check out [your ranking](#) on this month's challenge online!

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

Help us document as many holly trees and shrubs as possible this December! Remember that any observation still contributes to the Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Project, even if it's not featured in our monthly challenge.

WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

Hollies are in almost every plant community from coastal scrub, tropical hammocks, pine flatwoods to river floodplains.

LOOK OUT FOR...

The Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*) is sometimes called the Florida holly. It is not a holly at all, but a member of the same plant family as poison ivy (*Anacardiaceae*). It is an aggressive exotic species and highly invasive in Florida.



Ilex ambigua (Carolina, or sand holly). Note fine marginal teeth and membranaceous leaves.



Ilex ambigua (Carolina, or sand holly). Leaves membranous, with small marginal teeth (arrow).



Ilex cassine (dahoon holly). Leaves with no, or few marginal spines; typically broader toward the apex. This photo is of a male plant.



Ilex cassine (dahoon holly). Leaves can lack marginal spines, or have several small ones per side (arrow).



Ilex decidua (possumhaw). Leaves scalloped (arrow), not with teeth as in *I. ambigua*.



Ilex decidua (possumhaw).



Ilex glabra (inkberry, gallberry). Photo of a male plant. Note leathery leaves. Plant is often colonial, forming large patches.



Ilex glabra (inkberry, gallberry). Fruits purple-black, leaves broader toward apex, with one or two small marginal teeth toward the tip.



Ilex opaca var. *arenicola* (scrub holly). Leaves leathery, with few, but prominent marginal and apical spines. Rare in our area, found only in scrub habitat in Manatee Co.



Ilex opaca var. *arenicola* (scrub holly). Strong marginal and apical spines.



Ilex vomitoria (yaupon). Fruits red, leaves small and leathery with scalloped edges.



Ilex vomitoria (yaupon). Photo of a male plant.