

RUTGERS GARDENS

New Brunswick, NJ (USDA Hardiness Zone 6b)

2012 began with mild weather, with lower than average precipitation. January 16 and 17 both marked our yearly minimum temperature, falling to 10° F (−12.2° C). March tied 1945 as the warmest March on record, with 8 days above 70° F (21.1° C), and ended the warmest 12-month period on record for New Jersey—and one of the lowest-ranking snow seasons on record. April days reached over 80° F (26.7° C) (91°F [32.8° C] on April 17!), but ended with several days below freezing, falling to a low of 30° F (−1.1° C) on April 28. May was the end of our streak of 16 consecutive months of above-average temperatures in New Jersey, and the first month of the year with near-average precipitation. Spring 2012 (March-May) was the warmest on record for the state. The end of June saw five days exceeding 90° F (32.2° C). Record highs of 99° F (37.2° C) on the 8th and 101° F (38.3° C) on the 19th (also our 2012 maximum temperature) punctuated a very dry month of July. Average precipitation in August diminished again to a dry September. October was warmer than usual, but brought our first below-freezing nights on the 13th and 14th. It is not surprising that October was wetter than average with the arrival of Hurricane Sandy, which brought nearly 2 inches (5.1 cm) of precipitation between the 29th and 30th. November was drier than normal, with half of our 1.68 inches (4.3 cm) of precipitation delivered by a nor'easter on November 8. December averaged about 10° F (5.6° C) above normal, with above-average precipitation, over 5 inches (12.7 cm).

Our hollies did not fruit heavily in 2012, in part because the unseasonably warm March and freezing late-April days affected flower production and in part due to alternate-year bearing. Berries on the Winterberry Hollies (*Ilex verticillata*) were particularly decimated by the hurricane in late October. The deciduous *I. decidua* 'Simpson,' however, boasted quite a display of fruit. The hollies in the southwest part of the garden, behind the Holly House, continue to decline due to damage caused to the tile drains when water mains were installed several years ago. A number of our hollies appeared a bit thinner, and we will be fertilizing this year to help revitalize them. A few of our larger, overgrown hollies seem to be responding well to “hat racking” treatments administered two and three years ago for rejuvenation.

Our holly collection began as an evaluation of varieties in the 1950s and became the foundation of Dr. Elwin Orton's American Holly (*I. opaca*) breeding program. The original planting, together with some of Dr. Orton's recent selections (including 'Dan Fenton', 'Jersey Princess', 'Jersey Delight', and 'Jersey Knight'), make up one of the largest American Holly collections in the United States. In addition, our collection includes a wide range of other *Ilex* species and

hybrids, including noteworthy specimens of *I. opaca* (such as ‘Gaylean Gold’ and ‘Boyce Thompson’), *I. perado* (Madeira Holly), *I. × altaclerensis* ‘James G. Esson’, and other interesting hybrids. Also represented are numerous English Hollies (*I. aquifolium*), Chinese Hollies (*I. chinensis* and *I. cornuta*), Japanese Hollies (*I. crenata*), Inkberry Hollies (*I. glabra*), and well over 50 deciduous hollies (including *I. decidua*, *I. montana*, *I. serrata*, *I. verticillata*, and others).

Clayton Leadbetter, Ornamental Breeding Coordinator



Ilex opaca ‘Xanthocarpa Boyce Thompson’



Ilex opaca ‘Gaylean Gold’



Ilex perado (Medeira Hollies)