

ARBORETUM BOKRIJK

3600 Genk (Limburg) Belgium USDA Hardiness Zone 7b

We had a lot of rain throughout the year, no problems with long dry periods, and no winter at all. We had only a few days with temperatures below 0 °C (32 °F). We had neither early fall frosts nor late spring frosts. For the arboretum, and particularly the holly collection, it was one of the best years of the last decade.

We have two additions to our collection, a female clone of *Ilex buergeri*, and *I. × attenuata* ‘Pack’s Weeping’, both from Camellia Forest Nursery in North Carolina.

We have also planted a few hedges with our own seedlings (open-pollinated hybrids) of *I. leucoclada*, and some seedlings, also from open-pollinated seed, of *I. buergeri*.

Recently, *I. crenata* has become a very popular hedge plant in Europe. In the past, especially for small or medium-sized garden hedges, people have used box (*Buxus*) cultivars. Garden designers mistakenly overplanted these cultivars, usually using the same variety. This creates an ideal meal for insects. Every garden has the same species, and in most cases the same clone. In the whole country we almost see only one plant! Can you imagine! As a result, we have a lot of trouble with two fungi, *Cylindrocladium buxicola* and *Volutella buxi*.

Nursery owners try to solve the problem by selecting and promoting other plant species, and in this case they have chosen the Japanese holly (*I. crenata*) as the best plant to imitate a box hedge. The problem is they make the same mistake again, over-planting *I. crenata* ‘Green Hedge’, a selection of Arboretum Kalmthout in Belgium and a beautiful selection. It is indeed a good choice for hedge planting. Now the firm Oprins Plant (Jan Oprins, the owner, is also a member of the Holly Society) has chosen to grow *I. crenata* ‘Dark Green’ and ‘Blondie’. But I am afraid that within a few years every garden will have a hedge of one of these three selections, so it may be creating problems for the future. I think that we have to plant more seedlings with a different genetic pattern and use our native *I. aquifolium*.

In the past, Bokrijk imported most of the hollies in cultivation in Europe from different sources, mostly from other holly society test gardens, imported as scions or cuttings. We have also imported many as bare rooted plants from US nurseries. Now, as the regulations for importing plants are more complicated, it’s rather difficult to import new rooted plants from U.S. so I am afraid that many of the new selections have to come from European nurseries. I don’t know why, but in Europe the interest in hollies is relatively small. At the moment we have the largest collection of hollies in Europe, and most other gardens in Europe have plants of Bokrijk origin. We hope to import yet new selections, cultivars, or, especially, species, but it’s difficult for the reason already mentioned.

Last but far from least we have named a new holly: *I. serrata* ‘Wratrijk’ (Bokrijk selection), by Jef Van Meulder, on April 28, 2014. It is a female seedling of *I. serrata* from open-pollinated seeds. One of the seedlings had curious wart-like bulges on the young stems. Its name was given by one of our head gardeners, Jan Bogaerts, who is responsible for that section of the Bokrijk castle park where this holly is found. It’s also an allusion to the name “Bokrijk.” In Dutch, the name “vrat” is same as “wart.” We first called this selection “Wartboy” but after learning that it’s female, the name became “Wartgirl”. Jan Bogaerts then proposed the Dutch name ‘Wratrijk’, and that is the name we will use.

The original plant is now 2 m (6.6 ft) high. The bulges on the stems become larger as it grows and it looks extraordinary, especially where it can be an interesting attribute in a winter garden next to a deformed corkscrew *Corylus avellana* ‘Contorta’. We usually choose plants for their floral beauty, their variegated leaf, their leaf form, or their hardiness. It is rare to find a selection for its unusual stem or cork deformations. So this is a plant for the winter garden. It is a female plant, so it also has an interesting berry set. Berries require planting a male pollinator, especially in Europe where few other pollinators are available.

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