What better time of year than right now to consider planting a holly in the landscape? Holly leaves and berries are traditional symbols of winter and the Christmas season. The berries are plump and bright, and are looking pretty tasty to neighborhood birds out in search for dinner.

With over 500 cultivated varieties, hollies are widely adapted to areas throughout the United States. Besides many cultivars that grow well in Florida, there are eleven native Florida species. Sizes range from upright trees to low, spreading shrubs. Most are evergreen, but there are some deciduous hollies that grow well in our climate. The result is ‘a holly for every landscape’.

The holly leaves that are best known for Christmas décor are from the American holly, *Ilex opaca*. The upright evergreen has the typical spiny leaves and bright red fruit. This native plant is commonly found in the wooded hills and river floodplains of north Florida. It is often commercially grown as a specimen plant for use in landscape, also.

Male and female flowers appear on separate trees, and the male plants will not produce showy berries. Hundreds of cultivars have been developed and hybridized over the years to provide a wide selection of sizes and fruit color. Several heavy-fruited female cultivars which are adapted well to the south include ‘Amy’, ‘Bountiful’, and ‘Miss Helen’.

I recently had an inquiry about East Palatka holly. This holly is actually a cross between two native plants, American holly and dahoon holly. It was first found growing near the town of East Palatka, Florida, in 1927. This evergreen grows up to 45 feet and has a pleasing pyramidal shape. If grown without shearing, it develops into a beautiful pyramidal specimen with graceful, drooping branches.

When you purchase your East Palatka holly, how will you know if it will have berries? This holly is a female plant, and all selections will produce berries. Plants are propagated commercially by cuttings or grafting. As in Johnny Appleseed country, there are plenty of wild trees around for apple pollination. Unless our bees disappear, our female holly cultivars should give you and your birds plenty of colorful winter berries. To read more, go to [http://solutionsforyourlife.com](http://solutionsforyourlife.com)