

# International *Ilex* Cultivar Registration

By Jim Resch  
Holly Registration Chair

**5-22 *Ilex* [((*cornuta* ‘Burfordii’ × *pernyi*)  
‘Red Delight’ × *latifolia*) ‘Mary Nell’ × ?] ‘Alabama Lady’  
Female**

James Ray Head  
1087 Baber Rd., Rutherfordton, NC 28139

This selection originated as an open-pollinated seedling of ‘Mary Nell’ selected by Tom Dodd, Jr. According to Fred Galle’s “Hollies: The Genus *Ilex*” (Timber Press, 1997), “Tom Dodd Jr. has grown more than a thousand seedlings of ‘Mary Nell’, some very similar to the parents, others extremely variable. Many of these have been selected by others and are often labeled and sold as ‘Mary Nell Sibling’ but

‘Alabama Lady’, October 18, 2019



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'Alabama Lady'



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should be renamed or listed as ‘Mary Nell’ seedling.” In 1976, Dodd gave this particular seedling, labeled only as ‘Mary Nell Sibling’, to George Wood, who planted it at Tanglewood estate in Akron, Alabama (now part of Tanglewood Biological Station, of the University of Alabama). The status of the original Tanglewood specimen is unknown. The oldest documented clone is a cutting propagated by Ray Head from the Tanglewood specimen. He has grown the plant at his home in Rutherfordton, North Carolina (Zone 7b) since approximately 2000. He named the plant ‘Alabama Lady’ in recognition of the plant’s origins.

This largest known ‘Alabama Lady’ is an upright, broadly pyramidal evergreen tree, 5.5 m (18 ft) tall and 4.6 m (15 ft) wide after 20 years, unpruned and unfertilized, in the collection of Ray Head. The plant displays a horizontal branching habit and dense foliage. New growth is about 15-20 cm (6-8 in) annually on mature, fruiting plants. Young container plants can grow much faster with fertilization and ample watering, up to 46 cm (18 in) annually.

The leaves are stiff with a coriaceous texture. They are oval, with the largest leaves up to 12.9 cm (5.08 in) long and 7.5 cm (3.0 in) wide. The bases are rounded. In side view, the margins are convex. In top view, the margins are spinose, with 7-9 small spines per side. These marginal spines are somewhat irregular in size. Apices are acuminate, with a slightly reflexed tip spine. Petioles are 1.7 cm (0.67 in) long. Upper leaf surfaces are dark green, Green Group N137, and glossy, while lower leaf surfaces are dull, Yellow-Green Group 144B (Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart, 2007).

The plant produces pistillate flowers on old wood, which enlarge after blooming to form heavy clusters of fruit. These are oblong in side view, and rounded in cross section, up to 10 mm long and 9 mm wide. Ripened fruits are a bright red color, Red 42A.

Propagation may be accomplished from semi-hardwood cuttings in late summer at ambient temperature, or in October with bottom heat. Plants have been available from Ray Head, and also from Jim Resch, who propagated a number of plants in 2019 and has since distributed them to various Holly Society members for evaluation. Hardiness has been established in Zone 7, but has not been demonstrated elsewhere as of this time.

‘Alabama Lady’ was selected for its dense, attractive foliage, and

exceptionally heavy fruiting with red fruits that color earlier in the season than most *I. latifolia* hybrids. Compared to the female parent 'Mary Nell', the leaves of 'Alabama Lady' are more convex, slightly less glossy, and with fewer marginal spines. Those marginal spines are less regular in size than in 'Mary Nell'.

The standard specimen is deposited in the herbarium of the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. 20002.

All images Jim Resch



'Alabama Lady' heavily rooted cutting  
April 29, 2020.



'Alabama Lady' June 7, 2022.

Rooted cuttings of 'Alabama Lady'  
April 9, 2020.

'Alabama Lady' voucher specimen  
December 23, 2022.

