

A New Plant Introduction from the Arnold Arboretum: *Ilex glabra* 'Peggy's Cove'

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In October 1988, I was in Nova Scotia for a speaking engagement with the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. Several members were kind enough to show me the sights, including local natural areas. One day we were on a seaside barren, northwest of the fishing village of Peggy's Cove, looking out at the Atlantic Ocean. Crouched between us and the ocean, on a treeless shore that appeared to be more rock than soil, were numerous inkberries, *Ilex glabra*. I have a special interest in this species and had previously collected inkberry cuttings from the New Jersey pine barrens and from compact plants I spotted while driving along Massachusetts roadways. The plants at Peggy's Cove were dwarfed and misshapen by the harsh seaside environment, growing here near the northern extreme of the species' range.

I knew that a plant's response to its environment does not necessarily change its genetic makeup, so cuttings from these dwarfed plants might grow into large, robust shrubs when planted in a favorable garden setting. But then again—they might not. My hope was that, after countless generations growing by the shore, their compact habit was now genetic. As plant propagator's like to say, "The best time to take a cutting is when it's offered," so I collected cuttings from plant after plant until my hosts seemed to grow weary from watching me.

Thirty-eight of these cuttings—collected from perhaps 12 different plants—were stuck in the Arboretum's propagation house. At least 19 of the cuttings rooted, and all were given the accession number 929-88. Within this group I found what I had hoped to find: a more compact and smaller-leaved form of *Ilex glabra*.

Named 'Peggy's Cove' in honor of its site of origin, this cultivar is not only compact, but it also grows well. It has a mounded habit with branches right to the ground. The latter trait is notable since a complaint sometimes heard about the *Ilex glabra* cultivars 'Densa' and 'Compacta'

is that they frequently lose their lower branches. Other surviving plants of this collection either didn't grow well or weren't significantly different from cultivars already available.

At the Arboretum, the original plant of 'Peggy's Cove' (now accession number 500-2007-A) is growing in the Leventritt Shrub and Vine Garden, near specimens of 'Compacta' for easy comparison. This 22-year-old plant is now 48 inches (122 centimeters) tall and 60 inches (152 centimeters) wide with a rounded habit. Perhaps it isn't the best example because we have pruned it by harvesting many cuttings from it. Four lightly pruned 8-year-old plants near the Dana Greenhouses (accession number 3-2002) are 22 to 36 inches (56 to 91 centimeters) tall and 30 to 45 inches (76 to 114 centimeters) wide. 'Peggy's Cove' is a female, producing the typical small black fruits of this species (if pollinated by a nearby male *Ilex glabra*). The leaves of 'Peggy's Cove' are dark green and smaller than the average inkberry leaf.

'Peggy's Cove' inkberry grows best in full sun and tolerates light shade, but may stretch a bit and become less compact if in too much shade. Like many hollies, it prefers acidic soils that are evenly moist. Winter damage to leaves of this evergreen has been slight at the Arboretum. 'Peggy's Cove' is probably no hardier than what is typical for the species: USDA zone 5 (average annual minimum temperature -20 to -10°F [-28.8 to -23.4°C]). It is currently in the early stages of commercial production.

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