

A SPECIAL SECTION: STYLISH KITCHENS FOR CAPE & ISLANDS LIVING

# CAPE COD HOME

Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket & Coastal Communities

*Winter*  
by the sea

**A historic Sandwich home is transformed with holiday flair**

**Rare and native hollies flourish at a Brewster farm**

**Finding heavenly stuffed clams in a Cape Cod kitchen**





This magical  
Cape Cod farm  
is home to  
more than  
300 varieties  
of holly.

# *Golly & Gruven*

photography & text by dan dewey





*Bill Cannon knows everything about holly.*

This well-known holiday symbol is actually one of the most diverse and intriguing members of the plant kingdom. Over the last 30 years, Cannon has managed to cultivate over 300 varieties of holly at his Brewster residence, and in the process has become known as Cape Cod's Holly Man.

Cannon's interest in plants began at an early age. His father was both a florist and a horticulturalist, who planted the beginnings of the expansive holly collection on Route 6A decades ago. The holly that Cannon's father planted still flourishes today, including dozens of imported and native varieties of all shapes and sizes with berries in a rainbow of colors. In addition to the hollies, there are extensive boxwood plantings throughout the one-acre parcel and a number of specimens such as a stately *Franklinia* tree, several vibrant *Chamaecyparis cripplii*, and even an impressive 75-foot-tall redwood tree. These plantings are surrounded by an unbelievable diversity of holly (*Ilex*) covering the entire backyard of the property.

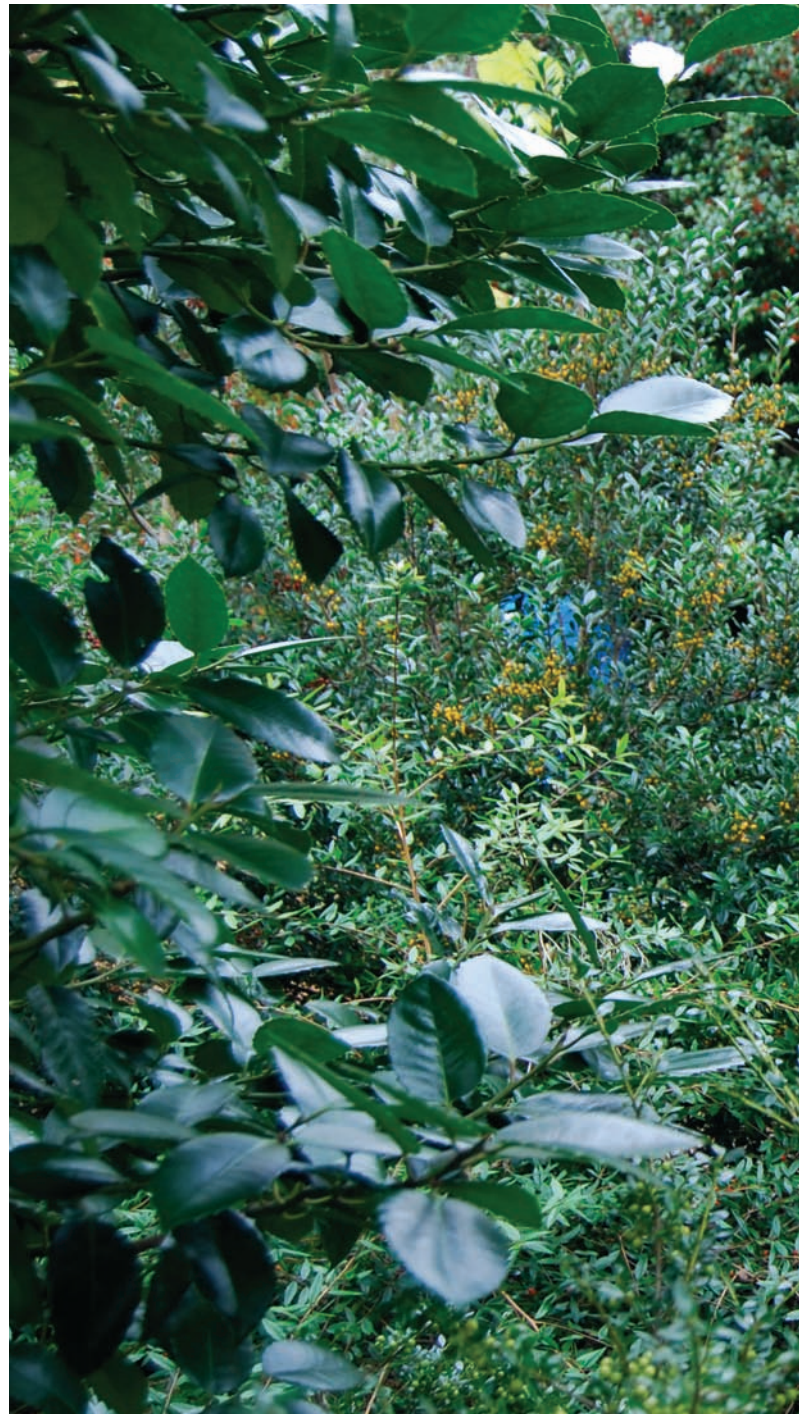




With the exception of more than 50 native hollies, the majority of *Ilex* varieties from around the world were thought for years to be too tender to survive Cape Cod winters and, as a result, were seen rarely in landscape plantings. Cannon has chosen plants that are native to the mid-Atlantic as well as America's southeast and grown them successfully here on the Cape for use in both residential and commercial installations.

Cannon has propagated three of his own hollies: "Gretchen"—named after his granddaughter and mother—"Purple Frost," and "Kelsey's Delight," all of which are registered with the Holly Society of America. Cannon's personal interest in *Ilex* has opened many doors over the years. He served as president of the Holly Society of America from 2007 to 2008 and is a longtime member of that organization and the esteemed Boston Horticultural Club, the oldest such club in the United States. Known as one of the most exclusive horticultural clubs in the country, members include some of the biggest names in New England's green industry such as Paul Mahoney of Mahoney's Garden Centers and Wayne Mezzit of Weston Nurseries in Hopkinton.

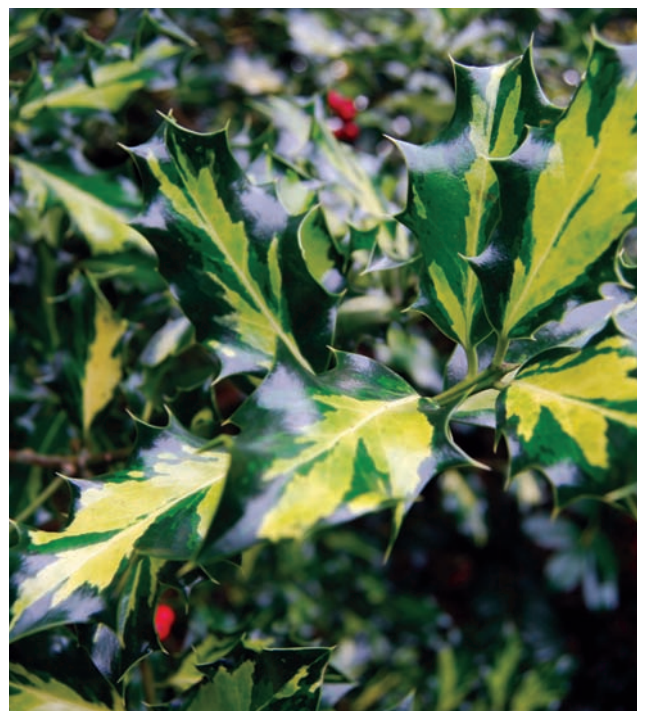
Cannon, a graduate of the Stockbridge School at University of Massachusetts Amherst, is grateful that his father sent him to the well-regarded horticultural school. A soft spoken, cheerful man with a warm smile, Cannon says of his father, "People say I have a green thumb, but compared to him, I'm an amateur—he could root anything." Tour groups, including local garden clubs, enjoy Cannon's stories as he wanders down garden paths, bending low to pick up a tiny holly, pointing out sharp thorns on an ancient 15th-century variety, exclaiming over the bright beauty of a golden Japanese holly.



Cannon leads Osterville Garden Club members through holly plantings, including (above) 'Lewis.' Different leaf and fruit colors (from left to right) 'Pinto,' 'Lassie,' 'Kurly Koe.' and 'Xanthocarpa' can bring a rainbow of color to Cape and Islands' gardens.











Walking through garden paths gleaming with multi-colored hollies and then wandering through the greenhouse full of vivid plants, Cannon is full of enthusiasm.

There are hollies of every shape and size on Cannon's farm, including (clockwise above from left) 'Ruby,' the first cultured variety 'Ferox,' 'English Variegated,' and 'Mistress.' 'Wintergold,' (opposite) is a spectacular holly with an abundance of winter fruit.






In the greenhouse his father built, Cannon tends to delicate holly cuttings when he is not outside in the elements caring for his treasured plantings, pampering such varieties as *Ilex verticillata* “Wintergold,” a spectacular holly with an abundance of peach-hued fruit in the fall and winter. In addition to cultivating, planting, and caring for the astonishing array of holly, Cannon has developed a niche market on the Cape for holiday wreath-making and seasonal green decorations. He shares helpful hints for using boxwood and holly to create wreaths that can last for months with proper care, explaining that the wreaths need to be outdoors, but should be kept out of full sun. He notes that holly wreaths require more care and misting than the boxwood designs.

Cannon constructs his wreaths, which are sold to florists and other customers during the holiday season, with a double wire ring. “I mound the ring up with wet sphagnum moss and then put in the holly,” he says, noting that the moss will “triple the life of the wreath.” Walking through garden paths gleaming with multi-colored hollies and then wandering through the greenhouse full of vivid plants, Cannon is full of enthusiasm. It is evident that his thousands of plants provide him with great purpose—and pleasure. He tells intriguing stories about his plants, some of which came from friends. However, the majority of the hollies were planted by this horticulturalist’s skillful hands.

When he is asked what other plants suit his fancy, Cannon gives a wry smile and says, “I can’t say no to a plant.” His passion for the entire plant world is evident, but it is clear that holly has won him over, some 300-plus times.

*Bill Cannon’s holly farm is located at 2081 Main Street, Brewster. To contact him, call (508) 896-3740 or email [ilexbc@verizon.net](mailto:ilexbc@verizon.net). *

*Dan Dewey is the owner of Dewey Gardens, a landscape design, maintenance, and construction company located in Centerville.*