

## American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)

A popular landscape plant since the beginning of American history, this broad-leaved evergreen has served a variety of uses through the years. The American Indians used preserved Holly berries as decorative buttons and were much sought after by other tribes who bartered for them. The wood has been used for making canes, scroll work and furniture, and has even been substituted for ebony in inlay work when stained black.

American Holly is a beautifully shaped tree, with a symmetrical, dense, wide pyramidal form. The spiny, dull green leaves are accented with clusters of red berries which persist throughout the fall and winter. Male and female flowers appear on separate trees and trees of both sexes must be growing in the same neighborhood to ensure production of berries on the female plants.

American Holly is ideal for use as a street or courtyard tree (with lower branches removed), specimen, barrier planting or screen. A 35-foot-tall tree can be 20 feet wide in 40 years.

This Florida native tree is ideal for naturalizing on moist, slightly acid soils. Flowers are highly attractive to a wide variety of pollinators while the fruit serves as an excellent food source for wildlife.

Growing well in full sun to partial shade, American Holly should be located on fertile, well-drained but moist, slightly acid soils. Berry production is highest in full sun on female trees. American Holly foliage thins during drought but these are tough trees with minimal insect and disease problems.

### Information Source:

Gilman, E. F. and Watson, D.G. (1993). *Ilex opaca: American Holly*. University of Florida.  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/st304>

Photos by: Alicia Lamborn

