American Holly

Ilex opaca

Height: 30 feet

Spread: 20 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 5

Description:

The consummate holly tree featuring spiny, evergreen leaves and showy red berries in winter, naturally pyramid-shaped; an excellent interest plant for the winter garden, somewhat slow growing, does best in evenly moist, acidic soils



American Holly
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



American Holly fruit
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Ornamental Features

American Holly is primarily grown for its highly ornamental fruit. It features an abundance of magnificent red berries from mid fall to late winter. It has olive green evergreen foliage. The spiny oval leaves remain olive green throughout the winter.

Landscape Attributes

American Holly is a dense evergreen tree with a strong central leader and a distinctive and refined pyramidal form. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This tree will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. It is a good choice for attracting birds to your yard. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Insects
- Disease

American Holly is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Vertical Accent
- Hedges/Screening

Planting & Growing

American Holly will grow to be about 30 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 20 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 3 feet from the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 80 years or more. This is a dioecious species, meaning that individual plants are either male or female. Only the females will produce fruit, and a male variety of the same species is required nearby as a pollinator.

This tree does best in full sun to partial shade. It requires an evenly moist well-drained soil for optimal growth, but will die in standing water. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. It is very fussy about its soil conditions and must have rich, acidic soils to ensure success, and is subject to chlorosis (yellowing) of the foliage in alkaline soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. Consider applying a thick mulch around the root zone in winter to protect it in exposed locations or colder microclimates. This species is native to parts of North America.