

Holly

Common name: Holly

Scientific name: *Ilex aquifolium*

Where it lives and comes from:

This tree grows in Central Europe and some Mediterranean countries, but not in the north. It can also be found in northeast Africa and southeast Asia.

Extra information:

- Type of leaf: Evergreen (it keeps its leaves all year)
- Height: It can grow up to 10 meters tall
- Flowers: It blooms in May. Its flowers are pollinated by insects like flies, wasps, and bees.

Description:

The holly is a tree that grows slowly and keeps its leaves all year. It can be 10 meters tall. It has a pyramid shape and a straight, smooth trunk with green-gray color. The leaves are dark green, hard, and have spiny edges. Its fruits are small and round, like peas. First they are green, but when they ripen, they turn bright red.

To tell if a holly tree is male or female, we look at the flowers. Male trees have small white flowers. Female trees, if pollinated, grow red fruits.

Uses in food and medicine:

Holly contains theobromine (like chocolate). It can also have caffeine, tannins, resins, and other plant acids.

It can be used for some medical purposes: It helps the heart, helps digestion, makes you sweat, and calms you down.

Other facts:

Holly is a famous symbol of Christmas. It is native to Spain and grows well here. Its green leaves with spiny edges stay shiny all year.

To make red fruits, there must be a male and a female plant. If not, it will not make fruits. The red berries are poisonous for people, so we should not eat them.

For the Celts, holly meant strength and good luck. They believed it protected homes from bad spirits. In winter, they hung holly branches in their houses as a sign of new beginnings. Later, this became a custom in Spain and North America.

Because it stays pretty in winter and doesn't mind the cold, it's great for Christmas decorations.