**Ilex x attenuata** ‘Fosteri’

**Fosters Holly**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Foster’s Holly #2 is one of the better cultivars of *Ilex x attenuata*, part of a group of hybrids between *Ilex cassine* x *Ilex opaca* (Fig. 1). Foster’s Holly reaches 15 to 25 feet in height with a spread of 8 to 12 feet, creating a dense, pyramidal silhouette. The trunk usually grows straight up through the crown, unless the tree was topped. The small, glossy, almost black-green, linear leaves have spiny margins, and are joined in spring by showy, small, white flowers. The blooms are followed by the heavy production of brilliant red berries, which persist on female trees from fall through winter.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Ilex x attenuata* ‘Fosteri’
- **Pronunciation:** EYE-lecks x uh-ten-yoo-AY-tuh
- **Common name(s):** Fosters Holly
- **Family:** Aquifoliaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 6 through 9 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (> 6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
- **Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 15 to 25 feet
- **Spread:** 8 to 12 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more
or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** columnar; pyramidal

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

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**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire; pectinate; spiny

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

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**Flower**

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

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**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** < .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

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**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

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**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
It is very drought-tolerant once established and has no serious pest problems.

There are other Foster’s Hollies - #1 and #4 - but these are less available and perhaps not as showy.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

**Pests**

Scale and leaf miners.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.

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**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Other**

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** not known to be susceptible  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

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**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

With its dense, compact, upright growth and neat habit, Foster’s Holly is ideal for use as a tightly clipped screen or hedge, or as a specimen, foundation, or container planting. Can also be planted in a small soil space or in a tall, narrow overhead space. Would probably make a suitable street tree but has not been extensively tried.

Foster’s Holly should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, slightly acid, moist soil.