**Ilex cornuta ‘Burfordii’**

Burford Holly

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**INTRODUCTION**

This dense evergreen shrub or small tree has glossy, dark green leaves, each with a single terminal spine (Fig. 1). Leaves are among the glassiest and darkest green of trees. The somewhat-showy clusters of fragrant, springtime, white flowers attract bees. The large, bright red, long-lasting berries during the fall and winter provide a nice contrast to the dark green leaves. The plants are self-fertile and do not need a male plant located nearby for pollination. It is one of the most popular shrubs in some areas of the country.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Ilex cornuta* ‘Burfordii’

**Pronunciation:** EYE-lecks kor-NOO-tuh

**Common name(s):** Burford Holly

**Family:** Aquifoliaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; espalier; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round; vase shape

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

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1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-301, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; terminal spine
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green; gray
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; extended flooding; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerance: moderate

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
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:** not particularly outstanding  
**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

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Although typically pruned for formal hedges, the large form and gracefully drooping branches of Burford Holly make it ideal for unpruned natural plantings or as a specimen for spacious areas and large buildings. There are much better plants for pruning into formal hedges. Burford Holly can also be trained as an attractive vase-shaped multi-stemmed small tree. Trees trained in this fashion often have a thick crown comprised of many branches and small-diameter trunks. Burford Holly should be grown and used in this fashion more often.

Growing best in rich, well-drained, slightly acid soil, Burford Holly does well in full sun or part shade. However, flowering and subsequent fruiting is reduced in shady locations. Burford Holly is drought-tolerant and easy to grow once established. It is well suited for low-maintenance landscapes which receive little or no irrigation or fertilizer after trees are established. Once the tree reaches 10 or 15 feet tall, growth rate slows. ‘Burfordii Nana’ makes a better shrub than ‘Burfordii’ due to a slower growth rate and smaller leaves.

Propagation is by cuttings only.

**Pests**

Burford Holly can be plagued with severe infestations of tea scale.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.