**Ilex latifolia**  
Lusterleaf Holly

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This broad-leaved, evergreen tree can reach 40 feet in height with a 20 to 25-foot spread but is usually seen at half that size (Fig. 1). The six-inch-long, glossy dark green, leathery leaves have serrate margins and are unusually coarse-textured and large for a Holly. The 0.25-inch-thick, newly emerging green shoots add to the coarseness of this attractive tree. New shoots droop under the weight of the emerging leaves creating a full-crowned, round or slightly pyramidal canopy. The inconspicuous, yellowish-white spring flowers are followed by a profusion of small, brick red berries (on female plants), appearing in dense clusters, and persisting on the plants throughout the winter. Both male and female plants must be planted to ensure production of the berries.

GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Ilex latifolia*  
**Pronunciation:** EYE-lecks lat-ih-FOLE-ee-uh  
**Common name(s):** Lusterleaf 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); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

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**DESCRIPTION**

Height: 20 to 25 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; pyramidal
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: medium
Texture: coarse

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate; spiny
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

**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

**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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** stout; thick

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** none

**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:** no pests are normally seen on the tree

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Lusterleaf Holly can be clipped or can grow on its own into a dense screen when located in bright light, but has a more open crown in shade. This makes a nice background plant in a shrub border in a large landscape due to the dark green foliage. Other plants contrast well when planted in front of it. Nurseries can train the plant into a multistemmed specimen or prune it to develop a single trunk for patio or street tree use.

Lusterleaf Holly looks its best if planted in an area receiving less than all-day sun and strong winds. Some shading in the afternoon would be fine. Not for exposed, windy, dry, full-sun areas, this Holly does well in shaded locations. Fertile, well-drained but moisture-retentive soils are best for this handsome evergreen. Plants will require only occasional pruning to maintain form and size and they can be espaliered on a wall or fence quite easily. The bold foliage of Lusterleaf Holly contrasts well with other plants and it is also a striking specimen planting on its own. Clear the inner portions of the branches of foliage and small twigs and light the tree at night from below to create a nice night-time specimen.

The cultivar ‘Wirt L. Winn’ is known for its excellent form and foliage color.

Propagation is difficult. Hardwood cuttings taken in fall and winter sometimes root. Seeds can take several years to germinate. Plants are sometimes grafted onto *Ilex opaca* seedlings.

**Pests and Diseases**

There is a caterpillar which occasionally chews holes in the leaves.