**Taxus baccata**

**English Yew**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**INTRODUCTION**

English Yew is most easily recognized in its trimmed form as dense hedges and screens, or shaped into topiary, but this dark green evergreen makes an outstanding specimen (Fig. 1). If left to grow naturally, it reaches 20 to 25 feet in height with a spread of 15 to 20 feet in most situations. Plants grow slowly and have been known to reach heights of 50 feet. The shiny, very dark green leaves are 0.5 to 1.5 inches long. The attractive, reddish-brown trunk is often fluted and can become quite massive. The inconspicuous flowers appear in spring and are followed by the production of small, showy, red, fleshy fruits which contain one of the most poisonous seeds known, capable of poisoning both man and livestock. Taxine, the toxic chemical, is found in the leaves, bark, and hard part of the seed.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Taxus baccata*
- **Pronunciation:** TACK-sus back-AY-tuh
- **Common name(s):** English Yew
- **Family:** Taxaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 5B through 7 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** Bonsai; hedge; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; specimen; Christmas tree; no proven urban tolerance
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

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**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 20 to 25 feet
- **Spread:** 15 to 20 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see; parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen; needle leaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green; yellow
Flower characteristics: 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: routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; very showy trunk; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: thin
Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other
Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Ozone sensitivity: tolerant
Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Yew is used in the tree form primarily to create a screen, to develop into a topiary or to plant as a large clipped specimen on a large estate or other large landscape. The dense crown makes it especially suited for a screen provided plants are located in full-day sun and they are given plenty of room to spread. If lateral space is limited, select one of the narrow, upright cultivars.

English Yew should be grown in full sun on well-drained, moist soil, acid or alkaline.

Propagation is by seeds (with difficulty), cuttings, or grafting.

Pests
Taxus mealybug, black vine weevil, Taxus scale, and yew-gall midge can cause some damage.

Diseases
No diseases are of major concern.