



©2005 Horticipia, Inc.

## Holly, Possum Haw (spp.)

### Leaf Identification

<b>Type:</b>	Simple
<b>Arrangement:</b>	Alternate
<b>Venations:</b>	Brachidodrome and pinnate
<b>Margins:</b>	Crenate and serrulate
<b>Shapes:</b>	Elliptic, oblong and obovate

**Fruit Color** Orange and red

The fruit is fleshy and round.

### Environment

This plant tolerates some drought and flooding.  
This plant will grow in dry to wet or submerged soil.  
Suitable soil is well-drained/loamy, sandy or clay.  
The pH preference is an acidic to slightly alkaline (less than 6.8 to 7.7) soil.

### Landscape Uses

- Border

### Attributes and Features

- Pest tolerant
- Wetlands plant
- Attracts birds
- Inconspicuous blooms
- Persistent fruit
- Attractive fruit
- Fruit is edible by birds

### *Ilex decidua*

**Possum Haw Holly, Deciduous Holly, Winterberry**  
**Aquifoliaceae (Holly)**

**Nomenclature:** Royal Hort. Society

**Type** Tree, shrub, woody plant

**Hardy range** 5A to 9A  
**Height** 15' to 20' / 4.60m to 6.00m  
**Spread** 15' to 25' / 4.60m to 7.60m  
**Growth rate** Slow  
**Form** Rounded and vase shaped  
**Exposure** Full shade to full sun

**Bloom Color** White  
**Bloom Time** Spring

**Leaf Color** Green  
**Fall Color** No change in fall color

### Native Habitat

Southeastern North America to north-central Florida

Native to the following North American locales: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia

### Crown, Branch and Twig

This plant is symmetrical with a fine texture and has a dense crown.  
This plant's bark is thin and not showy.  
Branches or twigs are thin.  
This plant is often grown with multiple trunks.

This plant can be trained to a single trunk.  
This plant has low flammability. National champions are 42 x 43 feet in South Carolina and 47 x 31 feet in Florida.

### Culture Notes

This native North American tree can become a 20-foot-tall tree when planted in partial shade. Although the 2 to 3-inch-long, dark green leaves are deciduous they do not present any appreciable fall color change. Plants can develop many stems arising from the ground creating dense thickets. However, lower branches are often removed to form a small tree with a tight head of foliage



along the outer portion of the crown. Interior leaves are often shaded out and drop from the tree. If lower branches are not removed, the plant develops into a large, spreading mound of foliage reaching to the ground. This plant is considered mostly allergy free and causes little or no allergy problems in most people.

Often found along stream banks in the wild, Possumhaw thrives on wet soil and can be used to stabilize stream banks and for planting in wet spots in the yard. This holly is unusual in that it grows well in alkaline soil. It can also be utilized as a large accent shrub or small tree planted in a lawn area as a specimen or near a patio. Allow for plenty of room for this plant to spread since they look their best when they develop a symmetrical canopy. They would make a good plant near water retention ponds and other areas which regularly accumulate water. They are also suited for planting into raised planters or containers. Male plants outnumber females by about ten to one. Birds prefer the fruit of other plants like viburnums so berries on Possumhaw last for a while through the winter.

Plants can be pruned into multi-trunked specimens or trained to one central trunk for use along paths and in the garden or lawn. Start pruning early in the life of the plant to develop the form you wish.

### **Maintain adequate mulch area**

Clear all turf away from beneath the branches and mulch to the drip line, especially on young trees, to reduce competition with turf and weeds. This will allow roots to become well established and keep plants healthier. Prune the tree so trunks and branches will not rub each other. Remove some secondary branches on main branches with included bark. This reduces the likelihood of the main branch splitting from the tree later when it has grown to become an important part of the landscape. Locate the tree properly, taking into account the ultimate size, since the tree looks best if it is not pruned to control size. The tree can enhance any landscape with its delightful spring flush of foliage. It can be the centerpiece of your landscape if properly located.

### **Tree establishment specifications**

Choose good quality trees for planting. The most common cause of young tree failure is planting too deep. In most instances, the point where the top-most root in the root ball originates from the trunk (referred to as the root flare zone or root collar) should be located just above the soil surface. You may have to dig into the root ball to find the root flare. If there is nursery soil over this area, scrape it off. Never place ANY soil over the root ball. The planting hole should be at least twice the width of the root ball, preferably wider because roots grow best in loose soil. In all but exceptional circumstances where the soil is very poor, extensive research clearly shows that there is no need to incorporate any amendments into the backfill soil. Simply use the loosened soil that came out of the planting hole. Simply planting with the topmost portion of the root ball slightly higher than the surrounding soil might still install the tree too deep - be sure to locate the root flare.

Weed suppression during establishment is essential. Apply a 3-inch thick layer of mulch to at least a six-foot diameter circle around the tree. This area should be at least two feet in diameter for each inch of tree trunk diameter and maintained during the establishment period. Apply a thinner layer of mulch directly over the root ball but keep it at least 10 inches from the trunk. This allows rainwater, irrigation and air to easily enter the root ball and keeps the trunk dry. Placing mulch against the trunk and applying too thick a layer above the root ball can kill the plant by oxygen starvation, death of bark, stem and root diseases, prevention of hardening off for winter, vole and other rodent damage to the trunk, keeping soil too wet, or repelling water.

Regular irrigation after planting encourages rapid root growth that is essential for tree establishment. Trees provided with regular irrigation through the first growing season after transplanting require about 3 months (hardiness zones 9-11), 6 months (hardiness zones 7-8), or one year or more (hardiness zones 2-6) per inch of trunk diameter to fully establish roots in the landscape soil. Trees in desert climates may take longer to establish. Trees that are under-irrigated during this establishment period (and most trees are) often require additional time to establish because roots grow more slowly. Be prepared to irrigate through the entire establishment period, especially during periods of drought.

Irrigation also helps maintain and encourage the desirable dominant leader in the tree canopy on large-maturing trees. Instead of a dominant leader, trees that are under-irrigated during the establishment period often develop undesirable, low, co-dominant stems and double leaders that can split from the tree later.

Unlike established plants, which do best with deep, infrequent irrigation, research clearly shows that recently transplanted trees and shrubs establish quickest with light, frequent irrigation. For trees planted in spring or summer, provide one (cooler hardiness zones) to three irrigations (warmer hardiness zones) each week during the first few months after planting. Daily irrigation in the warmest hardiness zones provides the quickest establishment. Following the initial few months of frequent irrigation, provide weekly irrigation until plants are fully established. With every irrigation, apply one (cool climates) to two (warm climates) gallons of water per inch trunk diameter (e.g. 2 to 4 gallons for a 2-inch tree) over the root ball only. In most landscapes that receive more than 30 inches of rain or irrigation annually, if the mulch area is maintained weed-free, irrigation does not need to be applied



outside of the root ball. Never add water if the root ball is saturated.

In cooler hardiness zones, in all but the driest years, irrigation of spring- and summer-planted trees usually can be discontinued once fall color has begun. Irrigation of fall planted trees, however, should be continued until foliage has dropped from the deciduous trees in the region. In warmer climates, irrigate fall-and winter-planted trees as described for the spring- and summer-planted trees.

In drier, desert climates there is benefit to be gained from applying additional irrigation outside of the root ball area. This is best done by making a large diameter berm four to six inches high, then filling it with water so it percolates into the soil. For the first two years, irrigate twice each week through the spring, once per week in summer provided monsoons arrive, and twice each week again in fall if it remains warm. Taper off watering to once or twice each month in winter and resume twice weekly next spring. For years three to five, water twice per month in spring, summer, and fall and once or twice per month in winter. During years five through seven, water once every three weeks in warm weather and once every six weeks in winter. After this, the drought-tolerant desert trees should be able to survive on natural rainfall.

Trees with good, strong structure need no pruning at planting, except to remove broken twigs. Do not remove branches to compensate for root loss - research has shown that this can be detrimental to establishment.

### **Pests, Diseases and Damaging Agents**

There are few serious problems affecting this plant.

