

The holly tree

Ilex aquifolium, Ilex serrata sieboldii, Ilex crenata.

Family: Aquifoliaceae.

Origin: Northern hemisphere. Australia. South america. Polynesia.

The holly tree can live more than 200 years and grow up to 14 meters of height. But normally they grow in bushes up to 5 meters high. There exist deciduous and perennial holly trees, having both red fruits which appear in autumn and last the whole winter, but only when the plant is already some years old. The leaves are compact and small of an intense green which can mute into yellow at the borders. The trunks are normally quite linear.

Fertilizer: I use solid fertilizer in spring and start reducing progressively the dose starting in summer and stopping totally in winter.

Light: Most Ilex prefer to be placed in the sun, inclusive hot sun, some species prefer mid-shadow.

Temperature and exposure: Holly trees prefer humid summers and not too cold winters as they won't survive very cold summers as are with temperatures below -10° Celsius. I have them outside the whole year without any problem. They don't like heavy winds, always prefer the humid type or even wind protected sites.

Pruning and cleaning: Eliminate all the young sprouts from the trunks and a excess of fruits as all these will weaken the tree. Prune the new branches and leafs where needed. Cut the branches to a length of 3 to 6 cm and give the tree a nice form cutting the main branches with care. The main prune should be done in early spring.

Wiring: The acebos can be wired very easily as the branches are very flexible and accurate to form. Be careful to avoid breaking the young branches and protect them always with raffia.

Repotting / Soil: The mixture to use for holly trees is made of 1/3 of humus, 1/3 of compost, 1/6 of clay and 1/6 of sand. The soil should be light and fresh, even sandy. I prefer low colored ceramic pots, normally in dark blue or dark green.

Watering: Water frequently keeping the soil humid but not wet. Be sure to water more when the flowering period starts to increase the amount of fruits. Let dry out from time to time but not for a long period.

Diseases: The only disease I have had yet on my holly tree was a light attack of aphids; but I suppose that this happened only because the tree was sited nearby a oleander bush which in summer is always very affected by these parasites.