

American Holly



GARDEN EARTH
NATURALIST
ECO-SERVICE CARDS

AMERICAN HOLLY

Ilex opaca Ait.

FAMILY: Aquifoliaceae

IDENTIFICATION CLUES



SIZE: medium tree, up to 70 feet tall



LEAF: evergreen, shiny and stiff; dark green above and paler green underneath. The leaf edges are wavy with sharp spines



FLOWER: white, small and inconspicuous in the late spring



FRUIT: red berries which remain on the stems into winter



BARK: pale gray and very smooth on younger trees; older bark appears rougher with “warts”



Where to Look

American Holly prefers rich, moist soil like along river-bottoms but will grow in drier soil and is fairly common throughout the state as an understory tree.

Importance to Humans

American Holly is used as an evergreen tree in gardens and for holiday decorating. The light, almost white wood is also used by cabinet makers and woodworkers.

Importance to Wildlife

The berries are an important food source for many birds.