

# Holly *Cuileann*



Conservation Volunteers  
Northern Ireland

*Ilex aquifolium*



## DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree sometimes reaching 10m (30ft) in height.

The dark green glossy leaves are wavy edged with spiny teeth. On some older trees, or those growing in dense shade, the leaves may become smooth edged except for a spiny point at the tip. The fragrant flowers are single sexed and borne on separate trees. They open in May, have four white petals and are carried in small clusters growing from the base of the leaves. The berries ripen in early winter and may stay on the tree until spring.

Holly has a wide tolerance of soil types. It is usually found as part of the shrub layer in woodland.

## PROPAGATION

Holly grows well from seed, but you will need to be patient.

Collect the berries from October onwards as they soften. Mash to separate the seeds.

Mix them with compost, place in a pot, labelled and outside. Leave them for the winter, the following summer and the second winter. Protect from mice. Keep moist.

Check for signs of growth after 18 months and sow in trays. Transplant the resulting seedlings in autumn and grow-on for a further year before planting out.

## INTERESTING FACTS

- Holly is one of our few native evergreen trees.
- Holly can withstand drought. Plants sometimes respond by shedding leaves, which will be replaced the following spring.
- The leaves last for up to four years on the tree.
- It has been much used for hedging. As well as being stock-proof it is very tolerant of regular cutting and grazing. New shoots will appear from cut stems both above ground and at ground level.

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