



Holly

Holly is an evergreen tree, which means that it doesn't lose its leaves in winter time. It can grow up to 10-25m high and is well known for its glossy, prickly leaves and scarlet berries. The prickly leaves prevent damage from animals.

In order to produce berries, holly trees need to have a male and female tree growing near each other. The male tree fertilises the flowers on the female tree, which are small and white and which appear in May. Once the flowers fade, they are replaced by pale green berries, which change in colour to scarlet as winter

Latin: *Ilex aquifolium*

Irish: Cuileann

approaches. These colourful berries attract birds, who feed on the berries and pass the seeds out of their bodies. When the seeds fall elsewhere, some will grow into seedlings and mature into trees.

The holly tree is popular in gardens, where it is grown as an ornamental tree. There are other varieties of holly, some with multicoloured leaves - partly green and partly yellow or white. Sometimes people keep the holly tree as a hedge, by keeping it trimmed.



Photo: © Susan Murphy Wickens

The Holly Tree

The wood of the holly tree is hard, heavy and white. It is used for making small pieces of furniture, as well as decorating other pieces of wood and for the white chess pieces.

Holly & the Christmas Tradition

In Ireland we connect holly with Christmas, but why? This tradition may come from a few different sources. The Romans presented holly boughs to the God Saturn, whose festival occurred in December. When Christianity took over, the tradition was kept on and became a symbol of Christmas. The pagan Druids viewed holly as a sacred plant with healing powers, and something designed to keep the earth beautiful during the harsh winter. Others saw holly as a symbol of Christ, the prickly leaves representing His thorny crown and the scarlet berries, His blood.



Buying "Green" Holly



If you are buying holly at Christmas time, try to make sure the holly was cut from trees that were planted especially for this purpose. Sometimes holly that is for sale is cut from trees without permission, often leaving the tree in a very poor state.

SEA HOLLY

Latin: *Eryngium maritimum* **Irish:** Cuileann trá

Though its name is similar and its leaves are prickly, Sea Holly is not related to the festive red-berried holly that we all know. Sea Holly is found growing on coastal beaches and on sand-dunes, where it is well adapted to the dry and difficult conditions. It is a member of the carrot family and its spiny blue-green leaves and powder blue flowers are unmistakable. Its flowering season is from July to August, but its unique leaves help to identify it at other times of the year. It is a perennial plant, which means it grows and flowers over several years.

