**Ilex x attenuata** ‘East Palatka’: ‘East Palatka’ Holly

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**Introduction**

Discovered in 1927 growing near East Palatka, Florida, this Holly is one of a group of hybrids between *Ilex cassine* x *Ilex opaca*. The broad, dull green, rounded leaves have one spine at the tip and few, if any, along the blade edge. The 30 to 45-foot-tall trees take on a moderately tight, pyramidal shape. A female Holly plant, East Palatka Holly is heavily laden with bright red berries in fall and winter, especially toward the top of the tree. A row of East Palatka Hollies will look quite uniform, adding to the popularity of the tree among landscape architects and designers.

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Ilex x attenuata*  
**Pronunciation:** EYE-lex x uh-ten-yoo-AH-tuh  
**Common name(s):** 'East Palatka' Holly  
**Family:** Aquifoliaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 7A through 9B (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** native to North America  
**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential  
**Uses:** hedge; container or planter; screen; specimen; street without sidewalk; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median  
**Availability:** not native to North America


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**Description**

- **Height:** 30 to 45 feet
- **Spread:** 10 to 15 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical
- **Crown shape:** pyramidal, columnar
- **Crown density:** moderate
- **Growth rate:** moderate
- **Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** spiny, entire, terminal spine
- **Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval), oblong
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance:** high
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Other**

- **Roots:** not a problem
- **Winter interest:** yes
- **Outstanding tree:** yes
- **Ozone sensitivity:** unknown
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant
- **Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**

East Palatka Holly makes a durable street tree throughout its range and is quite drought-tolerant once it becomes well-established. Most trees are sheared in the nursery, unfortunately, and this practice is often repeated in the landscape after planting. The natural shape of the tree is rarely seen but is a graceful pyramid of drooping branches growing from a strong central trunk, laden with bright red berries which remain on the trees until eaten by birds. The crown of East Palatka Holly grown with one central trunk is narrow, making it well-suited for urban areas having restricted vertical space.

Multi-stemmed, topped, and trimmed trees grow a wider crown and are probably not as suited for narrow, limited-space downtown sites as their single-stemmed counterparts. The tree should be grown with a central trunk. Young trees which are topped in the nursery grow several upright, multiple trunks. These eventually droop to the horizontal and then become more weeping, creating an unkempt, asymmetrical mess. Training the tree into a single-trunked tree will increase its durability and resistance to storm-damage, although many nurseries offer multi-trunked specimens. The tree grows well even in small tree pits carved out of downtown sidewalks.

East Palatka Holly grows quickly in full sun or partial shade on moist, acid soils. Growth is poor and foliage chlorotic on alkaline soil.

Another hybrid, ‘Savannah,’ is a fast-growing female plant which also produces abundant red berries. The foliage is light green and variably-spined.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

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*Figure 3. Foliage*
**Pests**
Scale and leaf miners are the only pests which cause damage, and this is rare.

**Diseases**
No diseases are of major concern.