**Ilex x attenuata ‘Fosteri’: Fosters Holly**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

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**Introduction**

Foster’s holly #2 is one of the better cultivars of *Ilex x attenuata*, part of a group of hybrids between *Ilex cassine* x *Ilex opaca*. Foster’s holly reaches 15 to 25 feet in height with a spread of 8 to 12 feet, creating a dense, pyramidal silhouette. The trunk usually grows straight up through the crown, unless the tree was topped. The small, glossy, almost black-green, linear leaves have spiny margins, and are joined in spring by showy, small, white flowers. The blooms are followed by the heavy production of brilliant red berries, which persist on female trees from fall through winter.

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**General Information**

Scientific name: *Ilex x attenuata*

Pronunciation: EYE-lecks x uh-ten-yoo-AY-tuh

Common name(s): Fosters holly

Family: Aquifoliaceae

USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 9B (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: hedge; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; container or planter; screen; specimen; street without sidewalk; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median; bonsai

Availability: not native to North America

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**Description**

Height: 15 to 25 feet  
Spread: 8 to 12 feet  
Crown uniformity: symmetrical  
Crown shape: pyramidal, columnar  
Crown density: dense  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: fine

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: spiny, entire, pectinate  
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), ovate  
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

**Flower**

Flower color: white/cream/gray  
Flower characteristics: not showy

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: round  
Fruit length: less than .5 inch  
Fruit covering: fleshy  
Fruit color: red  
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don’t droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
Pruning requirement: little required  
Breakage: resistant

**Current year twig color:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained; extended flooding  
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**

With its dense, compact, upright growth and neat habit, Foster’s holly is ideal for use as a tightly clipped screen or hedge, or as a specimen, foundation, or container planting. Can also be planted in a small soil space or in a tall, narrow overhead space. Would probably make a suitable street tree but has not been extensively tried.

Foster’s holly should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, slightly acid, moist soil. It is very drought-tolerant once established and has no serious pest problems.

There are other Foster’s hollies—#1 and #4—but these are less available and perhaps not as showy.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

**Pests**

Scale and leaf miners.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.