

Osmanthus heterophyllus False Holly, Holly Tea Olive, Holly Osmanthus¹

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Introduction

This large evergreen shrub or small tree is capable of reaching 15 to 20 feet in height and width but is most often seen at 10 to 12 feet high with an 8-foot spread (Fig. 1). Older plants grow as wide as tall and develop a vase shape with several main trunks typically originating close to the ground. The lustrous, dark green leaves have paler undersides and are joined in the fall by a multitude of barely noticeable, but extremely fragrant, white blossoms. They perfume a large area of the landscape.



Figure 1. False holly

General Information

Scientific name: *Osmanthus heterophyllus*

Pronunciation: oz-MANTH-us het-ter-roe-FILL-luss

Common name(s): false holly, holly tea olive, holly osmanthus

Family: *Oleaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: hedge; border; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100–200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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Description

Height: 8 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 18 feet
Plant habit: vase shape; round
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; terminal spine
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: brachidodrome
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: blue
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; loam
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: unknown
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

With its upright oval to columnar growth habit in youth, osmanthus is ideal for use as an unclipped hedge or trained as a small tree. It should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. It is often planted as a hedge or foundation plant, and makes a very effective screen. Its spiny foliage makes it well suited for planting as a barrier to help keep people from walking through an area. Since the flowers are not particularly showy, people will wonder where the delightful fragrance is coming from. This is a subtle plant which should be used more often in southern landscapes.

Plants thin somewhat in full shade, but form a dense crown in a sunny or partially shaded location. Planted on 4- to 6-foot centers, osmanthus can form a wall of fragrance during the fall and should be planted more often. They will not grow as fast as leyland cypress, but think of this osmanthus as a substitute for use in a sunny or partially shaded spot. Plants can be clipped to form a denser canopy, but flowers form on old growth and removing branches will reduce the flower display. With time, older plants can be trained into a small, multi-trunked tree.

Osmanthus should be grown in sun or shade in well drained soil. Plants are drought-tolerant once established. This is one of the most cold tolerant osmanthus varieties.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

Scales and nematodes may present a problem, and mushroom root rot is troublesome when the soil is kept too wet.