

Ilex vomitoria: Yaupon Holly¹

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Introduction

This upright, spreading small evergreen tree or large shrub, capable of reaching 15 to 25 feet in height with a similar spread, has small, dark green, leathery leaves densely arranged along smooth, stiff, light grey branches. Plants in the landscape require about 10-years to develop a distinct vase-shape. Sometimes clipped into a tight hedge, yaupon holly is ideal for training into a small tree with lower branches removed to reveal the interestingly-contorted multiple trunks. It can also be used for topiaries, espaliers, specimens, screens, or barriers. The non-showy male and female flowers appear on separate plants and are followed on the female plants by the production of brilliant red berries (yellow on some cultivars) which are quite attractive to wildlife. The flowers attract bees for several weeks. Purchase plants with berries on them (females) if you want a berry-producing plant, or buy trees which were propagated from cuttings of female plants.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ilex vomitoria*

Pronunciation: EYE-lecks vom-ih-TOR-ee-uh

Common name(s): Yaupon holly

Family: Aquifoliaceae

USDA hardiness zones: 7A through 9B (Figure 2)

Origin: native to the eastern half of the United States

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; espalier; hedge; deck or patio; screen; specimen; container or planter; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); urban tolerant; highway median; Bonsai



Figure 1. Full Form—*Ilex vomitoria*: Yaupon holly (left is standard form; right is weeping)

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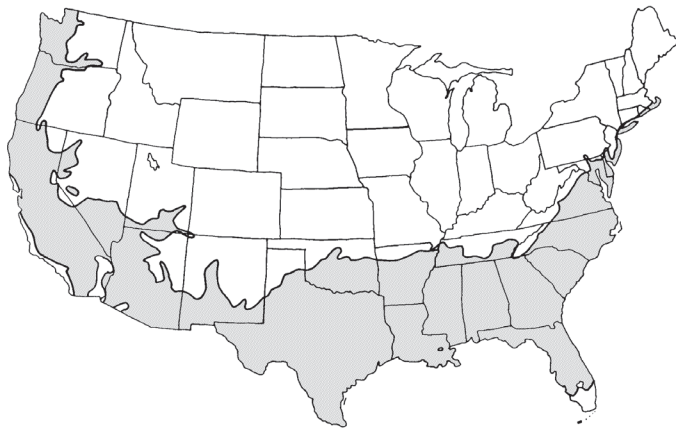


Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 15 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: vase, round

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrulate, crenate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: brachidodrome, pinnate, reticulate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: ½ to 1 ½ inches

Leaf color: dark green on top, lighter green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: greenish white

Flower characteristics: not showy; male—emerges in clusters; female—emerges solitary or in clusters

Flowering: spring

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ¼ inch

Fruit covering: fleshy drupe

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Fruiting: summer



Figure 3. Leaf—*Ilex vomitoria*: Yaupon holly



Figure 4. Flower—*Ilex vomitoria*: Yaupon holly



Figure 5. Fruit—*Ilex vomitoria*: Yaupon holly

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: white to gray, smooth, thin, and may become scaly with age

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: gray

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Ilex vomitoria*: Yaupon holly

Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to full shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; wet to well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

A tough native of the southern United States, yaupon holly grows quickly in a variety of locations, from full sun or shade to seaside or swamps, in sand or clay. Crowns will be thin in the shade. It will grow in soil with a pH in the 7's and is very tolerant of drought and sea salt. It sprouts readily from the roots forming clumps of upright shoots beneath the canopy. Sprouting is most troublesome if the soil beneath the canopy is disturbed, as in planting shrubs or flowers under the tree. These need to be pruned to the ground two or three times each year to maintain a neat appearance. Consider this when selecting trees for use on streets, parking lots, and other low-maintenance areas since thickets often form.

Yaupon holly is one of the most durable and adaptable of the small-leaved evergreen Hollies for use in southern landscapes. It grows well throughout its range in sidewalk cutouts and other sites with limited exposed soil. Wild yaupons are protected by Florida statute.

A few of the available cultivars include: 'Folsom's Weeping', similar to 'Pendula'; 'Jewel', female plant with heavy fruit production; 'Nana', dwarf, compact shrub form, male plant, no berries; 'Pendula' ('Grey's Weeping'), large weeping specimen, sparsely foliated, to 35 feet tall; 'Pride of Houston', medium-sized shrub with heavy fruit production; and a low shrub called 'Schelling's Dwarf' ('Stroke's Dwarf'), more compact than 'Nana'. Yellow-fruited cultivars include: 'Aureo', yellow berries; 'Otis Miley', small leaves, yellow fruit; 'Wiggins' Yellow', yellow fruit.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Pests

Scale, leaf miners, mites, and aphids appear to form a long list of problems, but none are normally serious.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.