

# *Ilex x attenuata*: 'East Palatka' Holly<sup>1</sup>

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## 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-lecks x uh-ten-yoo-AY-tuh

**Common name(s):** 'East Palatka' holly

**Family:** Aquifoliaceae

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

**Origin:** native to wherever *I. cassine* and *I. opaca* naturally occur in close enough proximity to cross pollinate, and thus hybridize; currently central Florida northward

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** native

**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



Figure 1. Full Form - *Ilex x attenuata*: 'East Palatka' holly  
Credits: UF/IFAS

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cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median



Figure 2. Range

## 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

**Leaf type:** simple



Figure 3. Leaf - *Ilex x attenuata*: 'East Palatka' holly  
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**Leaf margin:** spiny, entire, terminal spine

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval), oblong

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** dark green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** greenish white

**Flower characteristics:** not showy

**Flowering:** spring

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** < ½ inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy drupe

**Fruit color:** red

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

**Fruiting:** fall and winter



Figure 4. Fruit - *Ilex x attenuata*: 'East Palatka' holly  
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## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

**Bark:** gray, smooth, and thin

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant



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



Figure 5. Bark - *Ilex x attenuata*: 'East Palatka' holly  
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## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun to 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 jolly 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.

## Pests

Scale and leaf miners are the only pests which cause damage, and this is rare.

## 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. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.