



# Whatcom Weeds

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## ENGLISH HOLLY

### *Ilex aquifolium*

**THREAT:** English holly, a native of Europe, was introduced into North America for ornamental uses. It is a common garden ornamental and is also cultivated commercially in the Pacific Northwest, for its foliage. Birds spread the berries, which has allowed holly to become established in natural areas, such as native lowland forest. In forests, holly can form dense thickets that can suppress native shrubs and young trees. Holly also reproduces by producing suckers, and branches can root where they touch the ground. Holly is tolerant of a wide range of soil, moisture and light conditions, allowing it to invade a variety of sites. All parts of the plant can be toxic to humans, if ingested in large quantities. Berries are the most likely part to be eaten, and can cause gastrointestinal problems in children who have eaten as few as 3 berries.



**DESCRIPTION:** English holly is a slow-growing evergreen shrub or small tree, generally growing up to 15 to 30 feet, occasionally up to 50 feet. Holly plants may have a single trunk, or may have several more bush like stems. The bark is smooth and silver-gray in color. The 1 to 3 inch leaves are dark green, thick, waxy and shiny. Leaves usually have sharp, thick spines along the leaf edges, but leaves on older branches may be smooth. Some cultivated varieties have variegated leaves. Flowers are small, white, inconspicuous and sweet smelling. Holly flowers in early to mid summer and the bright red (sometimes yellow or orange) fruit ripens in the late fall, often remaining on the plant through the winter. The leaves and red berries are well recognized as common Christmas decorations. Plants are either male or female, with the berries being found only on female plants.



**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** English holly can be controlled through mechanical and chemical methods. Small plants can be hand dug or pulled. Larger plants can also be dug, but this can be labor intensive due to the extensive root system. Repeated cutting of the stems and any subsequent regrowth will eventually suppress the plant. Herbicide treatments are most effective when using cut-stump or frilling methods. Foliar applications of herbicide usually are not very effective, as the thick waxy leaves do not absorb herbicides well. Contact the weed control board for chemical recommendations.