UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Ilex x attenuata 'Savannah': Savannah Holly[1]

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Introduction

Savannah holly is a beautifully shaped tree, with a narrow, open pyramidal to columnar form. A 35-foot-tall tree can be eight feet wide in 40 years, indicating a moderate growth rate. The spiny, dull, dark green leaves have wavy margins and are accented in fall with heavy clusters of red berries which persist throughout the fall and winter. Male and female flowers appear on separate trees and must be located in the same neighborhood to ensure production of berries. Many nurserymen propagate from female trees so most nursery trees have berries. Many trees are grown with a central trunk and skinny lateral branches, although some nurseries offer those with several upright trunks growing straight up through the crown. Many trees are sheared in the nursery to create more branches and a fuller canopy than will be seen several years after planting.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ilex x attenuata*

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

Common name(s): Savannah holly

Family: *Aquifoliaceae*

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

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: hedge; 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; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft

Availability: not native to North America

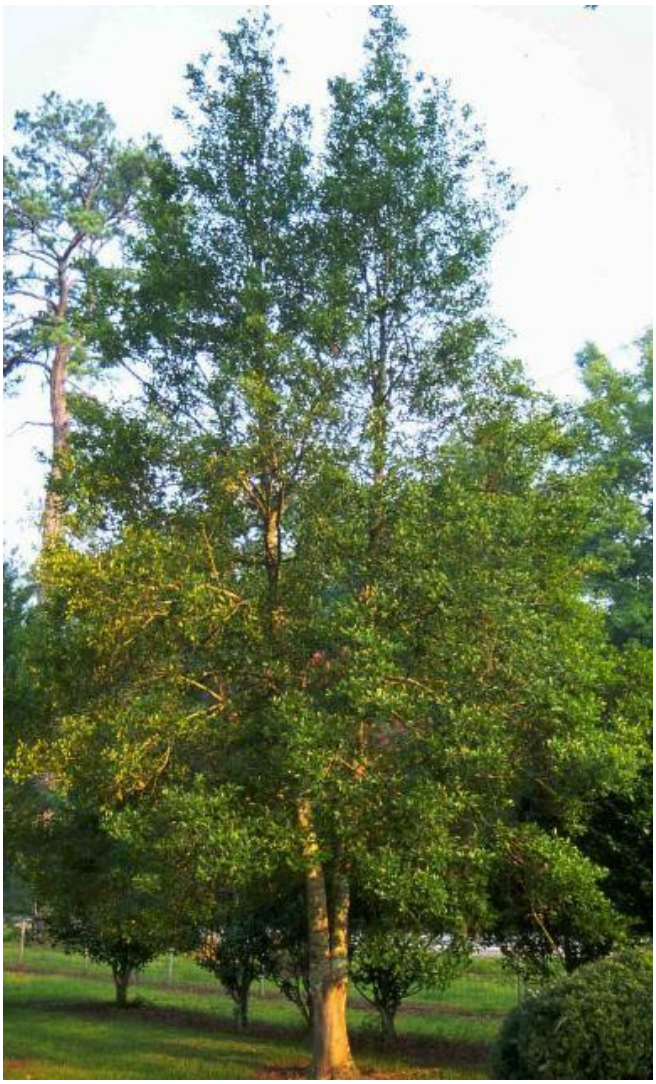

Figure 1. Middle-aged *Ilex x attenuata* 'Savannah': Savannah Holly
Credit: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 30 to 45 feet

Spread: 6 to 10 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: columnar

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

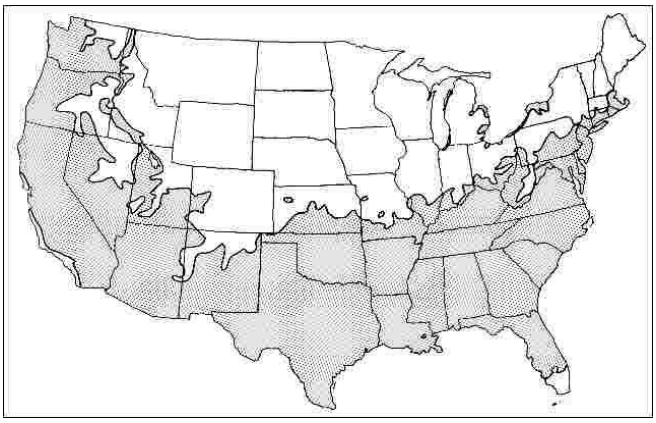

Figure 2. Range

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: terminal spine, spiny, 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

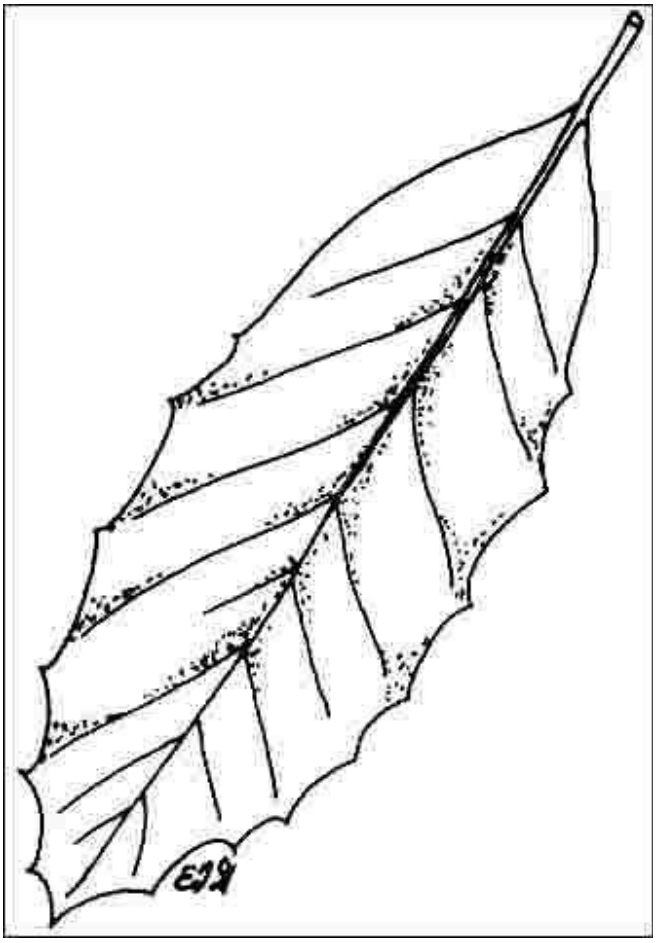

Figure 3. Foliage

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

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

Savannah holly is ideal for use as a street tree, framing tree, specimen, or barrier planting. There are better screens available such as Nellie R. Stevens holly and Foster's holly which are denser than the open-canopied Savannah holly. Roots are rarely invasive due to their great number and relatively small diameter. This native tree is ideal for naturalizing on moist, slightly acid soils, and the fruit is very attractive to wildlife, serving as an excellent food source.

A popular landscape plant, this broad-leafed evergreen has served a variety of uses through the years. The American Indians used preserved holly berries as decorative buttons and were much sought after by other tribes who bartered for them. The wood has been used for making canes, scroll work and furniture, and has even been substituted for ebony in inlay work when stained black.

Growing well in full sun to partial shade, Savannah holly should be located on fertile, well-drained but moist, slightly acid soils. Berry production is best in full sun. Savannah holly foliage thins slightly during drought but insect and disease infestations are usually minimal.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

Pests

Savannah holly is usually pest-free.

Holly leaf miner larvae mines out the leaf middle leaving yellow or brown trails.

Scales of various types may infest holly.

Spider mites cause discoloration and speckling of holly foliage.

Diseases

Savannah holly is not normally infected with disease.

Tar spot may occasionally cause small yellow spots on the leaves in early summer. Eventually the spots turn reddish brown with narrow yellow borders. Leaves may not drop prematurely but the infected areas drop out leaving holes in the leaves. Gather up and destroy badly infected leaves.

Many different fungi cause leaf spots on holly. Reduce the injury caused by leaf spots by keeping trees healthy. Dispose of diseased leaves.

Cankers caused by several different fungi lead to sunken areas on stems and plant dieback. Keep trees healthy and prune out infected branches.

Spine spot is small gray spots with purple margins and is caused by spines of one leaf puncturing an adjacent leaf.

Chlorosis symptoms are light green or yellowish leaves with darker green veins. This problem is due to a high pH leading to iron deficiency. Use acidifying fertilizers and sulfur to bring down the pH. Sprays of iron chelate will green up plants.

Purple blotches on the leaves are caused by some environmental factor such as nutrient deficiencies, drought, and winter injury.

[1] This document is ENH475, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture Department. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication.
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