

## Possumhaw Holly

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A small tree grows to about 30 feet tall in full sun or as an understory plant. The female plants have showy red fruit that persists in the winter unless the birds and wildlife are hungry. The leaves are small and light green. It makes a nice accent plant.

The possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*) is a deciduous holly which drops its leaves in the fall to reveal clusters of yellow to orange to red berries, which last all winter. It tolerates sun or shade, though in full sunlight growth is more dense with heavier fruiting. It has few enemies and grows in almost any kind of soil--acid or alkaline, dry or marginally damp. It reaches a height of 15 to 25 feet high and 10 to 15 feet wide. It can be pruned at anytime, which is a plus as you can expect many requests for branches of berries. The berries are a favorite of many species of birds.

Varieties to consider include Warren's Red, Council Fire and Byer's Golden. To ensure berries, plant one male possumhaw or male American holly for every six female trees. Each year in November and December, there is a flurry of interest by consumers, customers, and gardeners in what they call the 'yaupon-like plant without any leaves'. *Ilex decidua* attracts so much attention because of its spectacular and unique presentation of red, orange, and yellow fruit, which appear when the foliage drops in November or early December. The colorful berries usually remain all winter unless they are removed by the cedar waxwing or one of the other nine species known to feed on the fruit.

Possum-haw hollies are useful in the landscape as large shrubs or small trees, and may occur with single or multiple trunks. Female plants are preferred, since male selections are fruitless and provide little ornamental value.

Culture is easy. Possumhaws are native from East Texas to western regions of the state, and grow in a wide variety of soil and moisture conditions. They tolerate poor drainage quite well, but will thrive under fairly dry situations.

