

YAUPON HOLLY

Ilex vomitoria

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This native evergreen shrub or small tree may be oval to rounded in shape and singlestemmed or clump-forming. Yaupon can form dense screens of foliage and the female plant produces outstanding berries. The leaves are small, dark green and glossy with wavy edges. The fine-textured foliage makes it a perfect screen or tall hedge to contrast with bold plants.

From late summer through winter the graceful branches are lined with copious scarlet berries. Plant the female in a sunny location for good fruit production; the male trees can go in dark spots where you need foliage to fill in blank spaces. While male and female plants are needed for fruit set, this species is cross-fertile with other hollies.

Cold-tolerant, yaupon is widely tolerant of soil types and moisture levels, as well as salt and pollution. This holly grows in any soil, and likes full sun or partial shade. From coastal Virginia west to Missouri, south to Florida and Texas, yaupon grows in low woodland edges, fields and marshy spots.



A strong medicinal “black drink” once brewed by Native Americans is believed to have been of yaupon leaves. The caffeine-containing dried leaves reportedly make a desirable tea. Seeds are eaten by cedar waxwing, mockingbird and other songbirds after several freezethaw cycles.

The species name “vomitoria” refers to the emetic qualities of the fruits. ❖