



TACKLING English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Invasive species have significant impacts on the environment, human health, infrastructure and the economy in the Metro Vancouver region.

Native to Europe, northern Africa and Asia, English holly can grow in a variety of environments. This hardy plant spreads both by roots and seeds that are easily moved by birds, which make it a serious threat to forests. Unfortunately, many garden centres still sell English holly as a garden or hedge plant.

IMPACTS

English holly alters soils and monopolizes available water, making it more difficult for other plants to grow. Patches of this plant are a fire hazard as the leaves can easily catch fire when heated. **The berries are toxic to humans and pets.**

IDENTIFICATION

- **Lifecycle:** Large shrub or tree that lives for many years; plants are either male or female
- **Stem/Trunk:** Bark is green on young plants, smooth and silver on older plants
- **Leaves:** 2.5 to 6 centimetres long; thick, dark green and glossy; alternating on either side of the stem and with sharp spines around the edges
- **Flowers:** Tiny and white (rarely seen); bloom in the spring
- **Seeds:** Round, smooth, bright red berries found in groups on female plants only; seeds can survive during the winter but are often eaten by birds



Leaves

CREDIT: ISCMV



Female plant in winter
(with berries)

CREDIT: ISCMV



Bark of a mature holly tree

CREDIT: ISCMV

PREVENTION AND CONTROL

To prevent further spread across the region and beyond, it is best not to purchase, trade, grow or propagate English holly. If this plant is already present, it is critical to ensure it does not invade adjacent yards, parks and natural areas. Effective invasive plant management typically includes a variety of control methods. The following table summarizes the recommended techniques for controlling English holly on private property or where permission has been granted by the land owner or manager. **Wear gloves, eye protection, long pants, long sleeves and sturdy footwear to avoid scratches from the prickly leaves.**

CONTROL STRATEGY	TECHNIQUES	SUITABLE SITES	NOTES
Manual	Stem/trunk less than 3 centimeters diameter: pull by hand	Individual plants, small to medium sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove as much of the plant as possible • Easiest when soil is moist • Can be done throughout the year • Causes minimal harm to surrounding plants • May disturb seeds in soil and encourage growth of new plants
	Stem/trunk 3 to 10 centimetres diameter: pull or dig		

Cut branches off before pulling or digging to provide easier access to the plants. Cutting alone is not a recommended control method as the plants will re-sprout. Restore the area with native or non-invasive plants. Large English holly plants and trees have deep roots and may be best controlled by a professional arborist.

How Can You Help?

- Do not purchase, trade or grow English holly.
- Control invasive plants and replace them with a non-invasive alternative. Check out growgreenguide.ca for suggestions.
- Do not place invasive plants in your backyard composter as the temperature will not become hot enough to destroy the seeds and roots.
- To reduce the spread of invasive species, dispose of yard waste and soil appropriately. Visit your municipality's website for more information.
- Download the '[Report Invasives BC](#)' app to identify and report invasive species
- Join a stewardship group and help remove invasive species from local parks.

For the complete set of best management practices for English holly, and other key invasive species, visit MetroVancouver.org and search 'Invasive Species'.



A mature female English holly tree

CREDIT: ISCMV