
Profile

Dahoon Holly

Ilex cassine

Dahoon Holly is a small tree that has a narrow growth habit of upward pointing branches that grows to a height of up to 20-30 feet. It is often found in swamps and other wet locations where it achieves its greatest size. In warm winter areas, the dahoon is evergreen, but it tends to shed its foliage in colder climates.

Leaves are simple with smooth edges with just a few small sharp teeth and a sharp bristle at the tip. They are two to four inches long and about one inch wide.

The small white flowers, *right*, are inconspicuous and appear in spring. In the winter, female trees are covered with bright red or yellow berries.

Male trees do not have berries. People who purchase a Dahoon Holly and wonder why they never have berries need to purchase a male tree *and* at least one female tree in order for the blooms to be pollinated and the female tree to develop berries.

Ilex cassine is native to the eastern United States from Virginia to Florida to Louisiana.

Dahoon is adaptable to most conditions from full sun to deep shade. It is a wonderful native tree for landscapes in wet areas at the edge of lakes and streams. It tolerates brackish water and low-light conditions, so it is perfect as an understory tree especially in swampy areas. Although native to swamps and boggy areas, it can adapt to drier situations if it is watered regularly during dry periods.



Their brilliant berries are food for woodland creatures. People are not woodland creatures, so leave the berries alone; they are toxic.

However, leaves of some hollies can be carefully made into a tea, with or without caffeine. The leaves also have vitamin A, C and are packed with antioxidants.

Tea made from Dahoon Holly is very high in antioxidants and is free of tannins, meaning it lacks the bitter taste found in strong black teas but still has many health benefits. The best *Ilex* tea is made using an equal proportion of chopped, dry and roasted leaves and dried, steamed green leaves.

Ilex cassine was sacred to the native peoples of Florida and the east coast of North America, and was used similarly to *Ilex vomitoria* to produce the black drink, a beverage high in caffeine and that often caused vomiting. Although it may seem strange to modern Western people, this vomiting was actually considered a desirable method

of purging negativity in order to prepare for contact with the spirit world.

The leaves of *Ilex cassine* and *Ilex vomitoria* have been smoked as tobacco substitutes by native tribes and settlers, and were also used as tea substitutes by southern rebel troops during the American Civil War.

The use of Dahoon Holly leaves to prepare caffeinated tea is actually coming back in to style in the areas where the plant grows wild, and if the beverage

is not brewed too long, one can enjoy the flavor, stimulating effects, and health benefits without going through the ritual purging.

The leaves of Dahoon Holly contain 0.27 to 0.32% of a stimulating substance that has generally been identified as caffeine, as well as a tanning agent. Recent data suggests that this stimulating alkaloid is not caffeine, but rather Theobromine, one of the major active alkaloids in chocolate.

Since Dahoon Holly has a high caffeine content, the black drink is very stimulating and makes a potent emetic and diuretic. Strong brews usually cause vomiting, intense sweating (also thought to be purifying), and out-of-body trance experiences. The fermented black drink is both intoxicating and stimulating, and therefore does not carry the soporific effects of most fermented drinks. When other herbs are added to the black drink, it becomes much more potently psychoactive.

Reference: <http://entheology.com/plants/ilex-cassine-cassina-tree/>



WARNING

Dahoon holly is listed as commercially exploited species by the Florida Department of Agriculture. It is protected and wild populations should not be disturbed.