



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Ilex cornuta* 'Carissa'<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Carissa Holly is a compact, dense evergreen shrub with small, glossy, dark green leaves, each with a single terminal spine (Fig. 1). The somewhat-showy clusters of fragrant, springtime, white flowers are followed in fall and winter by some bright red berries. However, the berry display is mostly inferior to *Ilex cornuta* 'Burfordii'. The shrub stays small, eventually growing to about 8 feet. Most Carissa Holly plants are kept smaller than this. The plant occasionally reverts back to a 'Rotunda' Holly leaf form, a plant to which it is closely related. 'Rotunda' has many spines along the margins of the leaf.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Ilex cornuta* 'Carissa'

**Pronunciation:** EYE-lecks kor-NOO-tuh

**Common name(s):** Carissa Holly

**Family:** *Aquifoliaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 10 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** border; mass planting; cut foliage/twigs; superior hedge

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

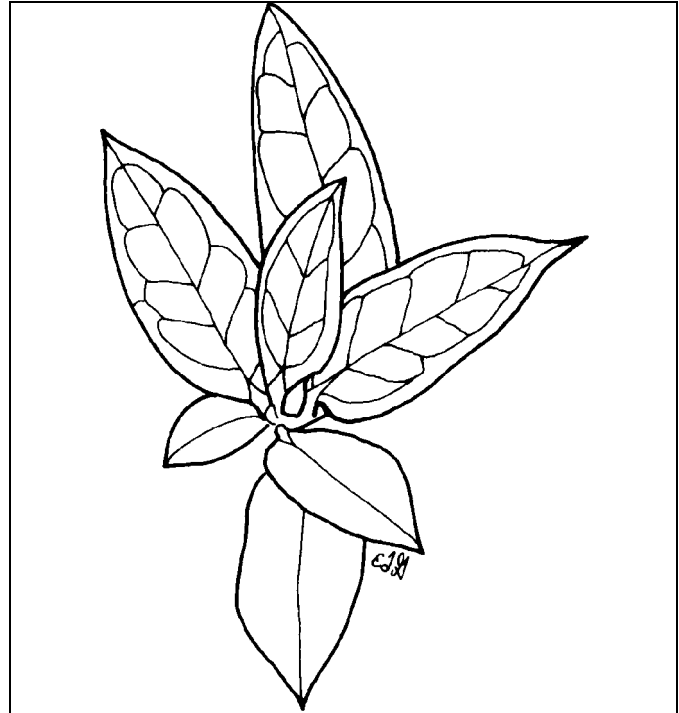


Figure 1. Carissa Holly.

### Description

**Height:** 3 to 4 feet

**Spread:** 4 to 6 feet

**Plant habit:** round

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-264, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. For information on obtaining other extension publications, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office. Florida Cooperative Extension Service / Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences / University of Florida / Christine Taylor Waddill, Dean



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** terminal spine
- Leaf shape:** ovate
- Leaf venation:** pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- Flower color:** white
- Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

**Fruit**

- Fruit shape:** round
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- Fruit cover:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** red
- Fruit characteristic:** rarely fruits

**Trunk and Branches**

- Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy
- Current year stem/twig color:** green
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

- Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun
- Soil tolerances:** slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

- Roots:** usually not a problem
- Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding
- Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

A dense rounded silhouette develops without clipping making it well suited for planting along a foundation. Plant 3 to 4 feet apart to form a hedge, farther apart in a shrub border. It is often used as a mass planting on commercial properties to form a tall ground cover or low shrub mass around parking lots. One yearly pruning can easily keep this plant in bounds in most landscape settings, unless it is clipped into a formal hedge. Two or three clippings may be needed for hedges. It shears fairly well, but will thin slightly toward the base, especially if not located in full sun. Clip the hedge so it is wider at the bottom than at the top to allow maximum light penetration to bottom foliage. This will help keep the hedge full to the ground.

Growing best in rich, well-drained, slightly acid soil, Carissa Holly does well in full sun or part shade. The plant is very drought tolerant, requiring little, if any, irrigation once established in the landscape. One or two fertilizations are all that is needed to maintain good leaf color and adequate growth.

Propagation is by cuttings only.

Holly can be bothered by scale insects and aphids.

### Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.