



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Ilex cornuta 'Carissa'¹

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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

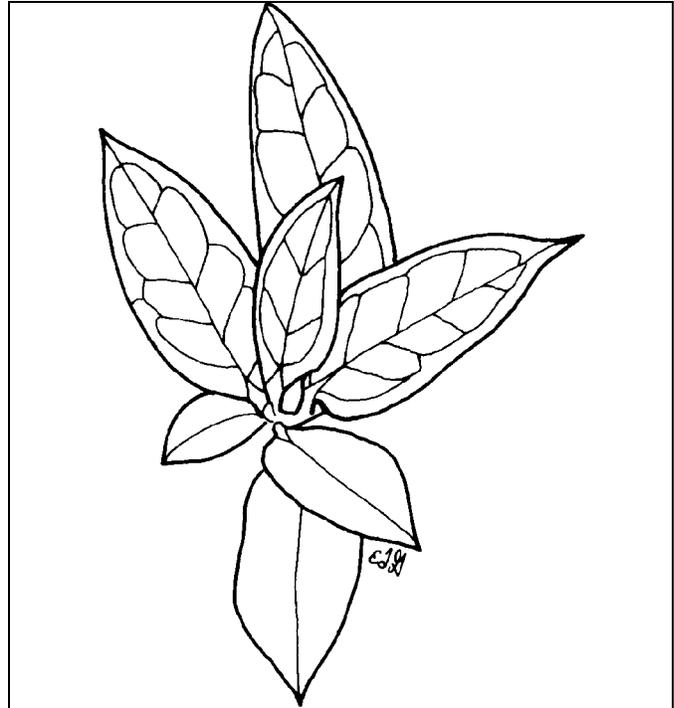


Figure 1. Carissa Holly.

Description

Height: 3 to 4 feet

Spread: 4 to 6 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

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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.