



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Lycium carolinianum*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

*Lycium carolinianum* is a small shrub that is commonly found in the southeastern United States at the edge of salt marshes and on sandy shell mounds (Fig. 1). This 6- to 10-foot-tall shrub has rigid branches that are sharply thorn-tipped. The tiny deciduous leaves of this plant are succulent and linear to oblanceolate in shape. Flowers are solitary in the leaf axils and are borne on slender flower stalks. These autumn flowers are blue, white or lavender and have purple streaks. The flowers are followed by large, bright, lustrous red berries that ripen in late autumn or early winter. Birds love to eat the ripe berries.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Lycium carolinianum*

**Pronunciation:** LYE-see-um KAIR-roe-lin-nee-AY-num

**Common name(s):** Christmas-Berry

**Family:** *Solanaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

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

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

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

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Uses:** border

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

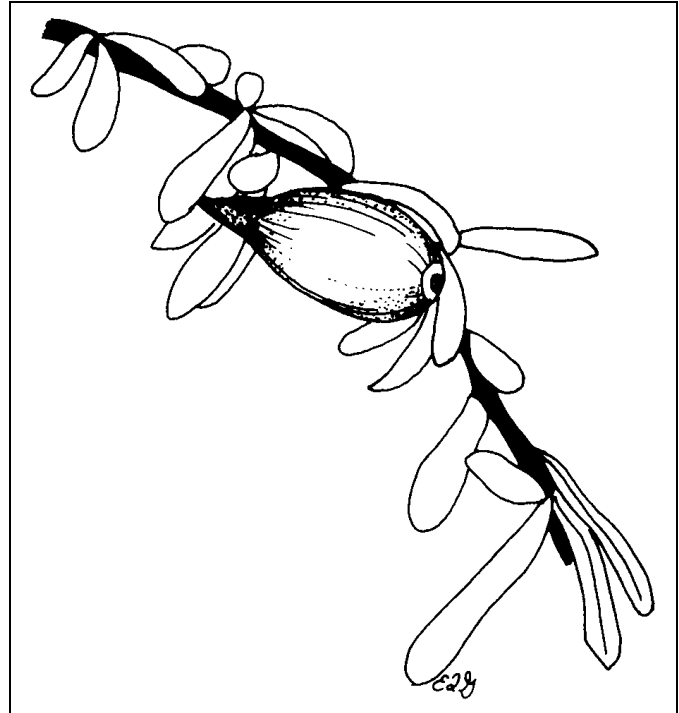


Figure 1. Christmas-Berry.

### Description

**Height:** 4 to 8 feet

**Spread:** 3 to 6 feet

**Plant habit:** vase shape

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** oblanceolate
- Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- Flower color:** blue; white; yellow
- Flower characteristic:** summer flowering; fall flowering

**Fruit**

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches
- Fruit cover:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** red
- Fruit characteristic:** attracts birds

**Trunk and Branches**

- Trunk/bark/branches:** thorns present; not particularly showy
- Current year stem/twig color:** gray/silver
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

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

**Other**

- Roots:** sprouts from roots or lower trunk
- Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
- Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes

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

## Use and Management

The Christmas-Berry makes a wonderful specimen plant and forms a nice border. Its fine texture compliments and contrasts most other plants in the landscape. It can be trained into a small multi-trunked tree for the patio or garden, or it can be grown in a container or raised planter.

The Christmas-Berry is very tolerant to salt spray and drought conditions and is great for coastal plantings. In addition to its native sandy dune habitat, Christmas-Berry can be found naturally along the edges of ponds, salty marshes and waterways. Plant this shrub on a well-drained or wet site that receives full sun or partial shade. Non-irrigated plants drop leaves in dry weather as a drought avoidance mechanism, but the next wet period brings new leaves. Growth is thin and the plant forms an open canopy in the shade. Suckers regularly form at the base of the trunks creating a multi-trunked thicket. These will have to be periodically removed to maintain a neat appearance.

### Pests and Diseases

There are few important problems growing this native plant.