



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Osmanthus heterophyllus¹

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Introduction

This large evergreen shrub or small tree is capable of reaching 15 to 20 feet in height and width but is most often seen at 10 to 12 feet high with an 8-foot-spread (Fig. 1). Older plants grow as wide as tall and develop a vase shape with several main trunks typically originating close to the ground. The lustrous, dark-green leaves have paler undersides and are joined in the fall by a multitude of barely-noticeable, but extremely fragrant, white blossoms. They perfume a large area of the landscape.

General Information

Scientific name: *Osmanthus heterophyllus*

Pronunciation: oz-MANTH-us het-ter-roe-FILL-luss

Common name(s): False-Holly, Holly Tea Olive, Holly Osmanthus

Family: *Oleaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: hedge; border; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

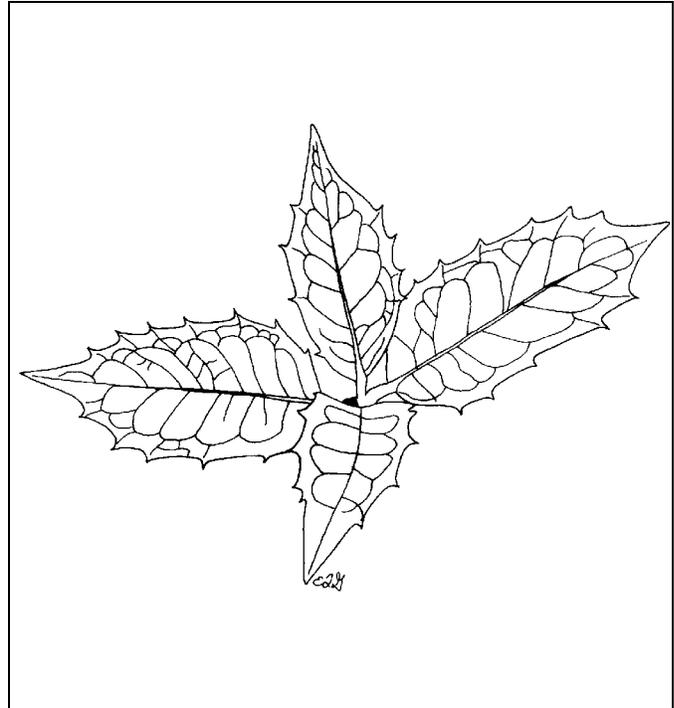


Figure 1. False-Holly.

Description

Height: 8 to 15 feet

Spread: 10 to 18 feet

Plant habit: vase shape; round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire; terminal spine
- Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)
- Leaf venation:** brachidodrome
- 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:** white
- Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; fall flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- Fruit cover:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** blue

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

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

Culture

- Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun
- Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; loam;
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Soil salt tolerances:** unknown
- 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

With its upright oval to columnar growth habit in youth, *Osmanthus* is ideal for use as an unclipped hedge or trained as a small tree, and should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. It is often planted as a hedge or foundation plant, and makes a very effect screen. Its spiny foliage makes it well-suited for planting as a barrier to help keep people from walking through an area. Since the flowers are not particularly showy, people will wonder where the delightful fragrance is coming from. This is a subtle plant which should be used more often in Southern landscapes.

Plants thin somewhat in full shade, but form a dense crown in a sunny or partially shaded location. Planted on 4 to 6 foot centers, *Osmanthus* can form a wall of fragrance during the fall and should be planted more often. They will not grow as fast as *Leyland Cypress*, but think of this *Osmanthus* as a substitute for use in a sunny or partially shaded spot. Plants can be clipped to form a denser canopy, but flowers form on old growth and removing branches will reduce the flower display. With time, older plants can be trained into a small, multi-trunked tree.

Osmanthus should be grown in sun or shade in well-drained soil. Plants are drought-tolerant once established. This is one of the most cold tolerant *Osmanthus*.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Scales and nematodes may present a problem, and mushroom root rot is troublesome when the soil is kept too wet.