

Holly - *ilex aquifolium*



The best time to spot Holly is in winter when surrounding deciduous trees are bare.

Holly is our commonest native evergreen tree. It is widespread throughout Selsdon Wood and familiar to most people with glossy, spiky evergreen leaves and red berries. There is a small, variegated Holly in Hillocks Wood (see bottom right 3/4/12).

Although usually considered to be a bush or shrub Holly can grow into a considerable tree and there are some in the wood that are as tall as the surrounding canopy. Perhaps the tallest is to be found in Farleigh Border at the junction with West Gorse (see right 27/3/12).



The berries (see above 10/11/11) are toxic to humans but are eaten by birds in late winter after frost has made them more palatable.



Holly is dioecious which means that there are separate male and female plants with only the females producing berries. The photograph of the berries (top left 10/11/11) is of the female Holly in Linden Glade. The flowers, borne in May/June only on plants over 20 years old, are small and white. The male flower has stamens tipped with yellow pollen (above left 18/5/12) while the female flower has a large green bump in the centre (above centre 18/5/12). This is the ovary that will develop into the berry.

Holly is widely used as Christmas decoration. This tradition dates back to pagan times but has been adopted by Christians because it symbolises the crown of thorns worn by Christ at his crucifixion with the red berries representing His blood.

Take a winter walk in Selsdon Wood and count the number of Holly bushes you can spot.
Why do they not all have red berries?

Holly is widespread throughout Selsdon Wood.
The map shows the three specimens mentioned overleaf.

