

## ***Osmanthus heterophyllus* False Holly, Holly Tea Olive, Holly Osmanthus<sup>1</sup>**

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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**



**Figure 1.** False holly

**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)

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**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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

### **Description**

**Height:** 8 to 15 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 18 feet

**Plant habit:** vase shape; round

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

### **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. It should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. It is often planted as a hedge or foundation plant, and makes a very effective 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 varieties.

Propagation is by cuttings.

### Pests and Management

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.