



Holly



Latin: *Ilex aquifolium*

Irish: *Cuileann*

Holly is native to Ireland and an evergreen plant, growing all year round. Many people use it to decorate their homes at Christmas.

Holly is often found growing on forest floors as a low bush. However, it can grow to over 15 meters high.

Description: It is easy to spot holly in the winter. It has dark green, prickly leaves and bright red berries. The white flowers of the holly grow in clusters between April and June. Bees carry pollen (tiny grains) from flower to flower. This is called pollination and is essential for the plant to grow. The red berries will only grow on female flowering holly bushes when it has been pollinated.

There are four seeds inside each of the red berries. They are important food for birds during the winter. When they have been frosted a number of times, the berries become softer and easier for the birds to eat. However, they are very poisonous to humans.

Celtic/Christmas link: During Celtic times, holly was seen as the king of the wintertime. Even today, it is still used as a Christmas decoration.

While holly makes a lovely Christmas decoration, it is important not to cut too much from one bush. This will mean fewer flowers and fewer berries will grow the next year.

Extra: The hard, white wood of the holly bush is used to make the white chess pieces. The chess black pieces are made from ebony.

Ogham: Ogham, the Celtic alphabet system, was based on trees. The Celts believed trees had different characteristics, emotions and magical or healing powers. The letters of this alphabet were linked to the names of trees.

The Ogham letter for the hazel tree was 'T' (tinne).