



The Herb Society of America

Promising Plants Profiles

Ilex vomitoria

Genus: *Ilex*

Specific Epithet: *vomitoria*

Common Name: yaupon, yaupon holly

Family: Aquifoliaceae (holly)

Flower Color: greenish white

Form: evergreen shrub or small tree

Hardiness Zone: 6

Height: 20'

Width: 15'

Soil: wet, heavy or sandy, well-drained soil; tolerates dry soil once established; neutral or slightly acid/alkaline

Sun: full sun

Uses: ornamental, economic, medicinal, culinary (leaves) - (berries are poisonous)



Ilex vomitoria 'Pendula'

This native evergreen holly gets a bad rap because of its botanical name and stories of its history, but this plant should be in almost every herb garden in zone 6 and warmer. Yaupon holly is an incredibly tough plant and grows in very wet, heavy soils or, once established, in very dry soils. Yaupon also has many fewer insects and disease problems than many other small-leaved evergreens.

There are enough cultivars of *Ilex vomitoria* to fill any garden design function. The straight species can grow 20 feet tall and 15 feet wide. Cultivars range from large weeping forms to tall, dense columnar forms down to dwarf forms that grow no taller than 3 feet. There are female cultivars available that have bright red berries, orange berries, or yellow berries. There are also variegated forms available. Anywhere an evergreen specimen or screen is needed there is a yaupon holly cultivar to fill the bill.

Unfortunately, most people associate yaupon holly with its Latin binomial, *Ilex vomitoria*, with an undue emphasis on the *vomitoria*. This specific epithet comes from the legendary "black tea" used by Native Americans as an emetic. The recipe for this tea included using green, unroasted leaves and/or making the tea very strong. Then it was drunk in excessive amounts. Sometimes button snakeroot, *Liatris* sp., was mixed in as well. Yaupon holly used alone as a tea does not cause vomiting. As one website, Wildflowers of Alabama, says "There is nothing in a tea made from *Ilex vomitoria* to promote vomiting. The Indians drank this tea in copious amounts. Drinking hot water in the same manner will produce the same results." – James Adams, Curator of the National Herb Garden, Promising Plants Presentation, 2003

Photo by James Adams

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