

ILEX AQUIFOLIUM L. – DEN NATURLIGT HJEMMEHØRENDE KRISTTORN I EUROPA

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Ilex aquifolium L. – the native Holly in Europe

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SUMMARY

Ilex aquifolium L. belonging to the family *Aquifoliaceae* is the only species in this family native to Europe. It is an evergreen shrub or small tree with spiny, dark green leaves. The species is a typical undershrub that can tolerate to grow in shade. The distribution of *I. aquifolium* occurs in north-western, central and southern Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor. Its northern distribution limit is at 63° 21' N in Norway but confined to the western coast, as *I. aquifolium* is sensitive to hard frost. Its limit of distribution follows the - 0,5°C isotherm. It flowers in May-June. It is dioecious with white four-merous flowers. Insects pollinate the plants. The leaves of the males are more spiny than those of the females and when the plants are adult they get entire leaves. The fruits are globose drupes containing three to five seeds. The fruits are mostly eaten by birds. The reproduction by seeds can take years because the seed coats are very hard and the embryos are immature. Vegetative propagation is most successful when using mature stem cuttings.

Ilex aquifolium is used as an ornamental in decorative, greenery and hedges.