

# PLANT HEALTH CARE REPORT



## Japanese Holly

Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*) is a dense, multi-branched, evergreen shrub used extensively in foundation plantings, hedges, topiaries, and mass plantings. It is generally compact and prefers full sun to partial shade, although characteristics vary among hundreds of cultivars. Japanese holly has inconspicuous flowers and fruit and separate male and female plants.



*Ilex crenata* 'Helleri'

Photo courtesy of [Jim Robbins](#)

Japanese holly is typically hardy to zones 5 or 6, but this varies by cultivar. Transplanting is successful in moist, well-drained, slightly acidic soil. Structural pruning should be done before new growth emerges in early spring. Pruning to maintain natural size and shape should be done after new growth hardens. Healthy Japanese holly can tolerate shearing, but to sustain winter hardiness, avoid shearing or structural pruning from late summer to fall.

A common stress factor that can lead to stem failure in this shrub begins with a nursery production practice known as double sticking--growing more than one plant in a single container to obtain a denser, salable holly. The two shrubs compete for resources in the limited space, often forming girdling roots and becoming rootbound. Once



*Ilex crenata* 'Sky Pencil'

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planted, the intertwined plants continue to compete below- and aboveground, extending branch growth away from their shared center. Uneven loads on the stem, compounded by the weight of snow or ice, can lead to branches breaking.

While holly is susceptible to several leaf diseases, the more damaging diseases affect the roots, root collar, and stems. Black root rot (*Thielaviopsis basicola*) and Phytophthora root rot commonly infect this species. *Phytophthora* invades roots when soils are poorly drained or overwatered. Stressed plants are also susceptible to stem cankers.

Japanese holly is susceptible to a variety of pests. Whiteflies may infest leaves, sucking the plant's sap and excreting honeydew. When black sooty mold fungi grow on the honeydew, the leaves have a dark, dirty appearance. Whiteflies are more common on hollies that have been sheared. Mite-feeding on leaves causes speckling or stippling and can be particularly damaging. Scale insects target the stem, sucking sap and reducing plant growth and vigor. In sandy soils, root systems may also be damaged by nematodes, microscopic roundworms.

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## Monitoring and Treatment Considerations for Japanese Holly

### Late winter

Apply dormant treatment to suppress overwintering insects and mites. Remove dead, dying, diseased, and broken branches. Reduce or remove branches to promote appropriate structure. Sample soil for nutrient and pH analysis.

### Early spring

Monitor for overwintering scales, mites, and whitefly; treat as needed.

### Late spring

Inspect for winter injury, and remove dead branches. Fertilize, adjust pH, and amend soil according to soil analysis. If plants are declining, collect root samples for Phytophthora and black root rot testing.

### Early summer

Monitor for scales and whitefly; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

### Mid to late summer

Apply soil treatment to suppress Phytophthora and black root rot if needed. Monitor for scales and whitefly; treat as needed.

### Fall

If scales and whitefly were problematic this past growing season, consider treating with an appropriately timed systemic product. Protect from winter winds with burlap wraps or other means in northern zones.

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