

# GRAB BAG

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## Wild Side

*Ilex aquifolium*

### Holly

By LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS

Although nearly 600 species of holly exist worldwide, *Ilex aquifolium*, commonly known as “English holly,” or “Christmas holly,” is the species that grows most prolifically in the Pacific Northwest. A native to southern Europe, northern Africa, and southwest Asia, this holiday favorite may not have originated here, but it certainly has gone wild.

Introduced in Oregon in 1874, the plant was popular with European settlers lonely for home, and sold well at nurseries in Portland and Seattle. Recognizing its holiday allure, farmers also began to grow and harvest holly commercially, and today, more than 90 percent of the holly sold in the

United States comes from the Pacific Northwest.

A hearty shrub, with beautiful, glossy evergreen leaves and bright red berries, this ancient plant continues to be revered by many, while scorned by some. An easy propagator, aided handily by birds who love to eat the fruit (which is poisonous to humans), the plant has proven to be a ready escapee from urban gardens and rural farms, turning up in second-growth forests throughout the region.

Study and debate over the plant’s possibility as an invasive species is ongoing, but no matter where one falls in that argument, there’s no denying that *I. aquifolium* — which has flourished on Earth for at



Holly grows prolifically in the Pacific Northwest.

least 66 million years—is likely here to stay, along with the great many human traditions that have morphed around it.

Pagan rites made use of holly during all rituals that dealt with death and rebirth — its evergreen leaves a simple and fitting metaphor. Ancient Romans gave holly as gifts during Saturnalia — the late December festival that celebrated the deity Saturn and the passing of the winter solstice. Druids brought holly into the home during Yule, or Midwinter, with the belief that faerie folk could live in its protective branches during the

coldest, darkest days of the year (note: the holly had to be burned by the festival of Imbolc, or Feb. 2, now Groundhog Day, in order to get the faeries to leave and not cause mischief). By Medieval times, Christian traditions used the plant’s characteristics to symbolize everlasting life, with the berries representing the blood spilled by Christ.

More practically, holly has been cultivated for use as winter fodder for sheep and cattle, as a traditional material for the making of Scottish bagpipes, and, perhaps most importantly, as the wood used to fabricate the magical wand of Harry Potter.

## N W

word nerd

By RYAN HUME

### Navy

[ne•vi]

noun

1. a group of ships; a fleet, or a nation’s assembled ships of war and associated yards and facilities

2. a very dark blue

3. *Navy Heights*: an unincorporated community on the east end of Astoria that shares the same zip code.

Navy Heights began as a World War II-era housing development back when Tongue Point was a U.S. Naval Air Station

#### Origin:

*Navy* comes from the Latin *navis*, meaning “ship.” It enters late Middle English by way of the Old French *navie*; *navy* is the plural form of the word and literally means “ships.”

It is not hard to imagine how the housing development got its name due to its relationship with the



nearby Naval Air Station at Tongue Point.

“War-related housing projects at Guild’s Lake and Ardenwald in the Portland area survived for some years, as did Navy Heights in Astoria.”

— Richard H. Engeman, “World War II Opens New Doors,” *The Oregon History Project*, <https://oregonhistoryproject.org>, 2005

“Fifty years ago this week: Four-year-old Billy Gregory, whose father is stationed at Tongue Point, caught a ride on the school bus from Navy Heights and made like he was going to go to class at John Jacob Astor School today.

Principal Bob Parnell said young Billy apparently thought the bus was picking up picnic passengers, so unbeknownst to his parents, climbed aboard.

G. T. Arrington, of the city police force, was called to the school to arrange to return the youngster to his home.”

— “Water Under the Bridge” *The Daily Astorian*, Sept. 14, 2015

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