

Still in Business!

Due to flooding on 19 November, Bandon Office Supplies suffered severe damage. However we will be back up and running in the New Year and we are taking care of customers by out sourcing current jobs. We apologise for any inconvenience that may be caused during the next few weeks but please bare with us while we try to get back to normal business.

Many thanks for your past and I hope future business.

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Feature HOME & GARDEN

The Holly and the Ivy

By **Grant Jenkins**
The Tree Company,
West Cork

This month Grant looks at the traditional uses of holly and ivy and their value to our native wildlife

Holly by tradition would have been used to bring green into the home 'Deck the Halls with boughs of Holly'. However it is not as prolific as it once was and in some localities under threat — this is because of competition from invasive species like rhododendron and cherry lau-



rel. Cutting wild holly boughs for home decoration also puts pressure on holly stocks in woodland and hedgerows.

Holly has a long flowering season of about three months starting in May. Male and female flowers are found on separate bushes, female bushes will not produce berries unless there are male trees nearby. Red holly berries can be seen on the tree at about the beginning of October and although they must look appetising to birdlife are left alone. This is because the berry contains a chemical that makes it unpalatable. It takes several months before this bitter taste will disappear, without this chemical there would no holly berries at Christmas. At last in January the berries become edible and are quickly made

use of at this bleak time of year by hungry starlings, blackbirds, thrushes and wood pigeons and in return they spread the seeds as they pass through their bodies.

Anyone who has ever climbed in a holly tree will know all about its defensive prickly spines which stop the tree being damaged by browsing animals. A strange feature of holly is when it reaches a height of about three metres its upper branches grow leaves that are prickly only at the leaf tip. The explanation for this may be that developing spines on leaves that are out of reach of browsing animals is a waste of energy. Deer are said to be one of the only animals that will attempt to tackle the lower foliage and traditionally the tops of hollies were cut for animal fodder.

Ivy, as commonly thought is not a parasite of trees; it uses the tree for support only. Ivy has aerial roots that tightly grip trunks and branches, enabling it to climb up into the uppermost parts of the tree where it can make the most of the light. Although it tolerates shade it will often favour deciduous trees over conifer trees because of the increased light levels during the winter. It gets all its water and nutrients from its roots that are firmly rooted in the ground. Ivy flowers are a source of nectar for bees, flies and wasps in October this happens at a time when most other plants are producing seeds and berries. Because of this you can often hear a loud humming emanating from ivy covered trees in autumn. Ivy berries ripen and become available to

birds in March and April this is of great value to wildlife at a time when food stocks are low after a long winter.

Holly and ivy have been used in mid winter pagan festivals and later in yuletide Christian celebrations, they epitomise the season being two of the few native plants that are green at this time of year. The mid winter festivals have always been a time of celebration and Holly and ivy have always been at the heart of these feasts. The display of green symbolised continuing life at the darkest time of winter and this still holds a magical fascination. Our modern greeting cards and Christmas paraphernalia are adorned with images of these two enduring native plants.

To me these plants are best seen in their wild state, providing food, warmth and shelter for our native wildlife and a glimpse of nature's future bounty

— Merry Christmas.

If you need any further information on regarding this article or indeed any other tree matters please write to us at The Tree Company, Ballydehob, Co Cork or email us at info@thetreecompany.ie or call our Office on 028 37630.

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