

The Holly is the *Ilex*

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Mixolydian mode, with the occasional touch of Dorian mode
Fairly relaxed (♩=118)

Oh, the hol-ly bears a ber-ry that is three per-cent fat,
As a frac-tion of the dry weight. It is meas-ured like that
Be-cause mois-ture con-tent var-ies. There is much wa-ter lost
In the sere-ness of the win-ter, in the sea-son of frost.
Oh, the hol-ly and the i-vy, be-ing na-tu-ral plants,
Have con-served the best mu-ta-tions that a-rose once by chance.

Oh, the holly bears a berry that is three per-cent fat,
As a fraction of the dry weight. It is measured like that
Because moisture content varies. There is much water lost
In the sereness of the winter, in the season of frost.

Oh, the holly and the ivy, being natural plants,
Have conserved the best mutations that arose once by chance.

Oh, the holly's an example of an angiosperm:
For a plant producing flowers, that's the botanist's term.
Therefore holly is a hardwood, unlike cedar or pine,
In the prime classification lumber merchants assign.

continued overleaf ...

Oh, the holly is a dicot. That's the term that we use
For a plant which, when it's sprouting, puts forth seed leaves in twos.
It has classic dicot features: pollen grains with three pores,
Leaves in which the veins are pinnate, flower petals in fours.

Oh, the holly is the *Ilex*, though there's more than one kind.
Aquifolium is the species that in England you'll find,
But in other ecosystems different species are seen.
Yerba maté, from the tropics, is a source of caffeine.

Oh, the holly has a berry that is heavy and needs
Active transport by wild creatures to distribute its seeds.
Though the berry is too bitter and too hard to eat fresh,
Nights of frost improve its flavour while they soften its flesh.

Oh, the holly is dioecious. You will note, if astute,
Half the plants have male flowers, and they never set fruit.
Since this fact is as important as the berries' red hue,
You might think old songs would note it, but we've found none that do.

Selected references:

There are several good Internet references to the overall botany and ecology of holly:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Holly,
<http://www.floralimages.co.uk/pilexaquif.htm>,
<http://www.arkive.org/common-holly/ilex-aquifolium/info.html>,
<http://lifeonanoxfordlawn.blogspot.com/2007/12/european-holly-ilex-acquifolium.html>,
<http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/H/Holly/Holly.htm>

Verse 1: The fat content of *Ilex aquifolium* berries is found in the 2008 version of FRUBASE, downloaded from a link on <http://ebd10.ebd.csic.es/mywork/frubase/frubase.html>. There are actually two listings, one stating that the fat content is 3%, the other that it is 4%.

Verse 3: The classic dicot features are documented on the Wikipedia page at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dicot>. In a pinnate-veined leaf, veins branch out from a mid-vein; see http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Leaf_-_Leaf_morphology/id/594859

Verse 6: That holly is dioecious is covered in the general references. Although I found no songs that mention its dioecious nature, I did find some interesting related folklore. In Germany, boughs without berries were considered he-holly, while those with berries were considered she-holly; see <http://hubpages.com/hub/THE-BEST-OF-BRITISH-TREES-PART-ONE>. In England, however, boughs with multi-prickled leaves, from the lower parts of the plant, were considered he-holly, while boughs with uni-prickled leaves, from the higher parts of the plant, were considered she-holly; see <http://www.thehistoryofchristmas.com/trivia/holly.htm>. In both traditions, whichever kind of holly bough was brought into the house first indicated the sex of the marital partner who would rule the house for the next year, so some couples were careful to bring in both genders of bough at the same time.

All of these Internet references were valid as of December 20, 2009.