



## Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)



Also known as: Christmas Berry, California Holly

### Summary:

Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is a broadleaf evergreen shrub or small tree native to California and common throughout the Bay Area's coastal scrub, chaparral, and oak woodland ecosystems. It typically reaches 8–15 feet in height, occasionally growing taller in favorable conditions. Toyon is known for its dark green, leathery, serrated leaves and for producing small white flower clusters in early summer. By late fall, these are followed by dense bunches of bright red berries that persist into winter, making the plant visually striking and ecologically important during colder months.

Toyon is drought-tolerant, adaptable to a range of soil types, and thrives in full sun to partial shade. It can be maintained as a shrub or pruned into a small multi-trunked tree for landscape use. Its berries provide a key winter food source for birds and mammals, while its flowers attract native bees and other pollinators. A versatile and resilient species, it plays an important role in supporting local wildlife and fire-adapted ecosystems across much of Northern and Central California.

### Appearance

- Size: Typically 8–15 ft tall, but can reach 20 ft
- Leaves: Glossy, deep green, and lightly serrated and often mistaken for holly
- Flowers: Creamy white and star-shaped, blooming in early summer



- Fruit: red berries ripen in late fall

## Fire & Drought

- Toyon is naturally drought-adapted and it thrives on neglect and sunshine
- After fire, it's a resilient resprouter, quickly regrowing from its base
- With occasional pruning, it can be included in firewise landscaping

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