



# TIP PRUNING NELLY STEVENS HOLLY

*Shaping for Beauty, Density & Lasting Structure*

*Nelly Stevens Holly is one of the most rewarding evergreens in the Oklahoma garden — fast, elegant, and endlessly shapeable. A little strategic pruning each season unlocks her full potential.*

## GROWTH CHARACTERISTICS

- **Type:** Ilex x attenuata — a hybrid American holly
- **Growth rate:** 3 to 4 feet per year when young
- **Mature size:** 15 to 25 ft tall, 6 to 10 ft wide
- **Natural form:** Pyramidal to columnar
- **Foliage:** Glossy dark green; semi-spiny leaves
- **Berries:** Abundant red berries; no male pollinator needed
- **Zones:** USDA 6 to 9 — thrives in Oklahoma heat

*Tip pruning keeps this vigorous grower dense and proportional rather than leggy.*

## TOOLS YOU WILL NEED

- Bypass hand pruners — for stems up to 1/2 inch
- Hedge shears — for shaping large sections
- Loppers — for thicker interior stems
- Rubbing alcohol or diluted bleach — sanitize blades between plants
- Sturdy gloves — the leaves are spiny

## WHEN TO PRUNE

### Primary window: Late February to mid-March

- Prune just before new growth emerges
- Stimulates the most vigorous, bushy spring flush

### Secondary window: Early June

- Light touch-up after spring growth hardens off
- Do not prune after July — tender new growth may not harden before frost

*Avoid late fall or winter pruning. New growth spurred at that time is vulnerable to freeze damage.*

## HOW TO TIP PRUNE

Tip pruning means removing only the soft growing tips — not a hard shear into old wood.

- **Where to cut:** Just above a leaf node or bud, 1/4 inch beyond it
- **How much:** Remove 2 to 6 inches of new tip growth — never more than one-third of a branch
- **Angle:** Slight angle to shed water away from the bud
- **Result:** Each cut tip branches into 2 to 3 new stems, doubling density

Work from the outside inward. Step back often to preserve the natural pyramid shape.

## PRO TIPS

- Never shear into old bare wood — hollies are slow to regrow from leafless stems
- Tip pruning young plants in years one through three builds a dense framework for life
- When used as a hedge, keep the top slightly narrower than the base for even sun exposure
- Dead, crossing, or rubbing branches may be removed at any time of year

*Less is more. A little tip pruning each season beats one dramatic shearing every few years.*