

What is mistletoe?



Mistletoe is a plant that is found growing on many different types of trees such as oaks, maples, apple, thorn, elms, firs, pines, apples, and elms that grow in moderate temperatures all over the globe. Some species have different host preferences. It obtains water and nutrients from a host plant. It is an incomplete or Hemiparasite in that it also manufactures its own food through photosynthesis as well. Although eventually Mistletoe infestation can prove fatal to the host, this may take a very long time, sometimes many years. As with many other parasites, once the host dies so does the Mistletoe.

There are thousands of different species that make up Mistletoe, but it is divided into two types called “true Mistletoes” – European and American, with the American being the type that is used as a holiday decoration.

They have no real root structure. Instead they use what is called sinkers and haustorias, which makes its way into the host tree. Seeds germinate in the spring after maturing over the winter. In the beginning the plant actually grows into the host tree and may not show any signs of growth for many years.

This plant has yellowish flowers small, yellowish green leaves and waxy, white berries. The berries are poisonous if ingested. There are many species of this plant in the *Viscacea* and *Loranthacea* plant families. European Mistletoe is identified by its smooth edged, oval leaf shape that normally occurs in pairs along the stem. The berries of this plant are white and waxy and are very dense in two to six per cluster.

Being a host tree for Mistletoe comes with a price, which is the reduction of the tree’s development, and when infestation is heavy, it can kill the tree. Keep Mistletoe under control by consulting a professional as soon as it appears, as care must be taken to avoid damaging the integrity of the tree. A tree that is basically healthy can endure a few broadleaf Mistletoes, but the branch itself may die.

Here in America, we have the Eastern Mistletoe which is similar, except the leaves are shorter and wider with clusters of berries that are longer and contain ten or more berries. In the U.S., these plants are commercially harvested for holiday decorations.

Information for this article was provided by google, wiki answers, wikipedia, botanysuite101.com, pests of landscape and shrubs, by Steve H. Dreistadt, Jack Kelly Clark, Mary Louise Flint and Stormy Holloway, Sterling Management Services. Photo credit wikipedia.