

Ardisia escallonioides Marbleberry¹

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Introduction

Marlberry is a 12- to 15-foot-tall shrub native to Florida and the Caribbean region that has a very important place in planting design. It often occurs naturally with Sabal Palms and Stoppers. The dark green, semiglossy leaves of this shrub are 3 to 4 ½ inches long. The small, white, fragrant flowers occur in dense terminal panicles that are 5 inches in length. Flowers are borne at intervals throughout the year but do not last very long. In the late spring this plant bears its small purple fruit.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ardisia escallonioides*

Pronunciation: ar-DIZ-ee-uh ess-kal-lon-ee-OY-deez

Common name(s): Marlberry, Marbleberry

Family: *Myrsinaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 1)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: hedge; near a deck or patio; specimen; screen; attracts butterflies; border

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 12 to 20 feet



Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Spread: 6 to 12 feet

Plant habit: oval

Plant density: symmetrical habit with a regular (or smooth) outline and individuals having more or less identical forms

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

1. This document is FPS-48, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date October 1999. Revised May 2007. Reviewed June 2011. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy; no thorns

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam;

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Marlberry is great in mixed group and background plantings. It can be trained into a small tree by removing lower foliage and branches to expose the interesting trunk pattern. The multiple trunks become an interesting element in the landscape, and they look nice lighted at night. Space them 15 feet apart along an entrance road or sidewalk to create a nice linear planting of multi-trunked small trees. Since they will remain quite dense even in the partial shade, they make a great screen for residential landscapes.

This shrub prefers well-drained soils and a semi-shade to full sun location in the landscape. It will grow in soils with a wide pH range from a sandy humus to calcareous shell and is fast growing.

Marlberry is easily propagated from seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.