

Capparis cynophallophora Jamaican Caper¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

This 6- to 20-foot-tall, native shrub is an upright to spreading plant that is related to plant producing edible capers (Fig. 1). The evergreen leaves of the Jamaica Caper are light-green above, with fine brown scales below. These glossy, oval leaves are folded together when they first emerge and give the plant's new growth a bronze appearance. The leaves also have a notched tip. Twigs are brownish gray and pubescent. Jamaica Caper flowers have very showy, two-inch-long, purple stamens and white anthers and white petals. The inflorescence is comprised of terminal clusters consisting of 3 to 10 individual flowers. The fruits are 3- to 8-inch-long cylindrical pods containing small brown seeds that are embedded in a scarlet pulp.

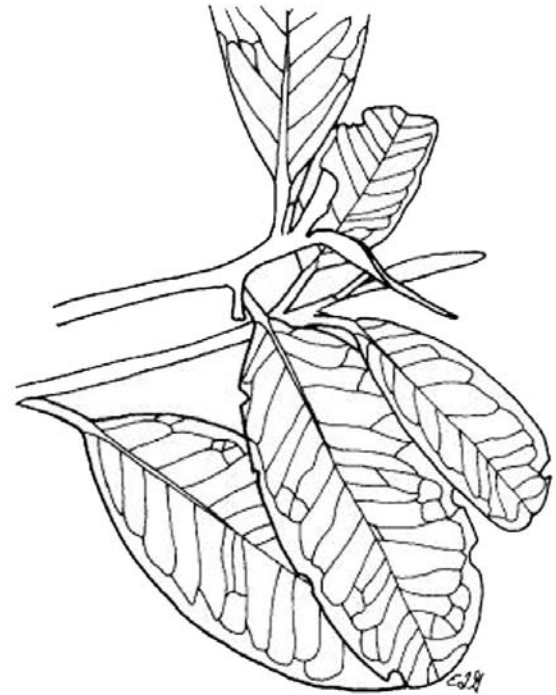


Figure 1. Jamaican Caper.

General Information

Scientific name: *Capparis cynophallophora*

Pronunciation: KAP-ar-riss sin-oh-fal-oh-FOR-uh

Common name(s): Jamaican Caper

Family: *Capparidaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: near a deck or patio; screen; border; attracts butterflies; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking

lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 6 to 15 feet

Spread: 8 to 12 feet

Plant habit: vase shape

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

Current year stem/twig color: brown

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

Drought tolerance: high

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

Jamaica Caper can be utilized as an understory tree in the partial shade. Train the plant into a tree by removing low, drooping branches, and heading upright branches to thicken their diameter. It can also be clipped into a hedge or tall screen to block an undesirable view.

Grow *Capparis cynophallophora* in an area that receives full sun to medium shade. This plant performs well in soils with good drainage and can tolerate cold temperatures to 28°F. It is also drought resistant and responds to fertilizer with vigorous growth.

Propagate the Jamaica Caper by seeds.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.