

Syzygium paniculatum Brush Cherry¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

Brush cherry has beautiful reddish foliage when it first emerges (Fig. 1). The shiny leaves slowly turn dark green on thin brown twigs. Older plants eventually reach to about 12 feet tall, but most are clipped into hedges in residential landscapes.

Showy white flowers borne in the warm months are usually pruned off and not very noticeable, but flowers on unclipped plants are quite attractive as they fill the canopy. Several stems arise from the lower part of the tree, forming a multiple trunked tree well adapted for many landscapes. The plant may still be referred to as *Eugenia myrtifolia* in some catalogues.



Figure 1. Brush cherry.

General Information

Scientific name: *Syzygium paniculatum*

Pronunciation: sizz-ZYE-gee-um pan-nick-yoo-LAY-tum

Common name(s): brush cherry

Family: *Myrtaceae*

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: container or above-ground planter; near a deck or patio; superior hedge; 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); narrow tree lawns (3–4 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4–12 to 20 feet 6 feet wide); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Description

Height: 12 to 20 feet

Spread: 8 to 15 feet

Plant habit: vase shape; oval

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: purple or red

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red; black

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; showy

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; 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: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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

Use and Management

The most common use of brush cherry is for a tall screen or hedge. Small leaves, year-round growth and a natural compact habit make this one of the premier hedge plants in south Florida. It is also nicely suited for espalier or topiary. Drought tolerance and nice foliage make it a nice addition to a deck or patio when planted in a container.

Trees can be trained in the nursery to one central trunk or allowed and encouraged to develop multiple trunks as plants age. The bark on these older trunks is quite showy. Brush cherry creates shade for a patio or deck, but will not grow to the large, often overpowering size of a large tree such as a fig. They can be used along streets, in highway medians, and in parking lots because they adapt to small soil spaces and do not become very large. Street and parking lot trees are often specified to have one trunk to allow for vehicle clearance beneath the crown. Multiple trunked trees are often specified for specimen planting so the beautiful bark can be displayed.

Brush cherry grows well in south Florida on limestone soils as an understory plant. However, it is perfectly adapted to more open, sunny locations where it will flourish with little care once it becomes established.

Pests and Diseases

Scales and mites can infest the foliage and twigs.