

# *Arbutus unedo*: Strawberry-Tree<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Most often seen as a multi-stemmed, rounded, evergreen shrub or small tree reaching 8 to 15 feet in height with an equal spread, Strawberry-Tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height, and makes a very attractive specimen tree when pruned to a short, single trunk. The trees take on a picturesque, somewhat twisted appearance over time, and exhibit dark, red/brown, flaking and shreddy bark accompanied by the lush, dark green, leathery, red-stemmed leaves. Growth rate is slow so trees over 20 feet tall are rare.



Figure 1. Mature *Arbutus unedo*: Strawberry-Tree

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Arbutus unedo*

**Pronunciation:** ar-BEW-tus YOO-nee-doe

**Common name(s):** Strawberry-Tree

**Family:** *Ericaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; specimen; screen; hedge; deck or patio; container or planter; highway median

**Availability:** not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH244, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed May 2011. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

## Description

**Height:** 8 to 18 feet  
**Spread:** 8 to 20 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical  
**Crown shape:** round  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** slow  
**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** obovate, oblanceolate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray, pink  
**Flower characteristics:** showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** red, yellow  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green, reddish  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** moderate  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** unknown

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** yes  
**Outstanding tree:** yes

x

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

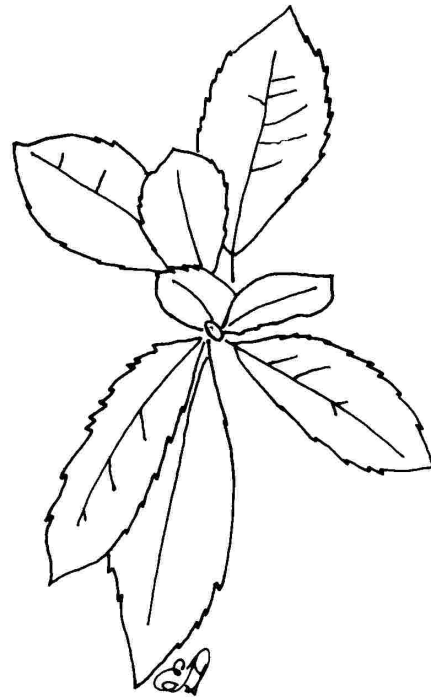


Figure 3. Foliage

## Use and Management

In fall and winter, the small, white or pink blooms in two-inch-long panicles appear at the same time the previous-year's fruit are ripening. These unusual fruits have a rough, pebbled outer surface which ripen from yellow to red and persist on the tree throughout the winter, adding much to the tree's overall attractiveness. Although the fruits look appealing, their bland taste seems to be popular only with birds.

Strawberry-Tree spreads quite wide as it grows taller and produces dense shade, making it ideal for use as a small shade, screen, hedge, or patio tree. The appearance of both fruits and flowers during the winter months also makes this plant very popular for specimen plantings. It is one of the most attractive small trees available for residential use but unfortunately is not normally available in the east. It should be grown and tried in the Deep South.

Strawberry-Tree will grow at a slow pace when planted in either full sun or partial shade on well-drained, acid

soil. Plants are tolerant of wind and some drought once established and grow in well-drained clay.

The cultivar `Compacta` is a smaller shrub, six to ten feet tall and wide; `Elfin King` has a contorted, dwarf form, flowers and fruits year-round; `Rubra` has deep pink flowers.

Propagation is by seed or layering.

## **Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.