Psidium littorale: Cattley Guava

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

Introduction
This upright, multi-branched, evergreen shrub or small tree has many features which make it a popular landscape choice. Unfortunately, Cattley Guava has escaped cultivation and has infested ditch banks and other wild areas in south Florida, and its use should be tempered. Capable of reaching 25 feet in height but often seen at 10 to 15 feet, the thick, smooth, dark green, four-inch-long, leathery leaves nicely complement the smooth, grey-brown to golden bark which attractively peels off in thin sheets. The single, white, one-inch-diameter flowers have many prominent stamens and look like powderpuffs in miniature. The blooms appear heaviest in April but can open sporadically throughout the year.

General Information
Scientific name: Psidium littorale
Pronunciation: SID-ee-um lit-aw-RAY-lee
Common name(s): Cattley Guava, Strawberry Guava
Family: Myrtaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: invasive non-native
Uses: shade; deck or patio; specimen; espalier; fruit; container or planter; highway median
Availability: not native to North America

Description
Height: 15 to 25 feet
Spread: 12 to 20 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: round, vase

Figure 1. Middle-aged Psidium littorale: Cattley Guava
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range


2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Crown density: moderate  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** obovate, elliptic (oval)  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate, brachidodrome  
**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

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

### Flower

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

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval, round  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch, 1 to 3 inches  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** red  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don’t droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** little required  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green, brown  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin, medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

### Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained

### Drought tolerance: high  
### Aerosol salt tolerance: none

### Other

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no  
**Outstanding tree:** no  
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown  
**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

### Use and Management

The 1.5-inch-diameter, bright red, pear-shaped fruits ripen to a very dark red in July and are a popular treat for people and wildlife. Birds, raccoons, and squirrels all love the delicious, sweet-tart, white flesh and will widely spread the small, grape-like seeds. The abundant, fallen fruits may be messy on hard surfaces such as walks and cars, and trees should probably not be planted along residential streets or over sidewalks or patios. It would make a good small boulevard or median street tree and accents an area with its well-shaped canopy and interesting trunk form. It combines well with other plants in a shrub border and provides both food and cover for wildlife.

Cattley Guava grows well in full sun or partial shade on a wide range of soils, including sand or clay, but fruit quality is improved on rich soils. Plants are drought-tolerant once established but benefit from a thick, organic mulch. Any necessary pruning should be done after fruiting. Pick the fruit for eating before the fruit fly larvae discover it.

*Psidium littorale* var. *littorale*, Lemon Guava, is slower-growing and has large yellow fruits with delightful, spicy flavor.

Propagation is by air-layerings or by seeds. Seeds germinate easily and rapidly. Seedling plants take seven or eight years to bear fruit.

### Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Fruit fly larvae devour the fruit but do no harm to the tree.