**Syzygium paniculatum** Brush Cherry

Edward F. Gilman

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**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.

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**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

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**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.