Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry Guava

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Introduction
This upright, multi-branched, evergreen shrub or small tree has many features which make it a popular landscape choice. Unfortunately, strawberry 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 cattleianum
Pronunciation: SID-ee-um kat-lay-ee-AH-num
Common name(s): Strawberry Guava, Cattley Guava
Family: Myrtaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Figure 2)
Origin: native to Brazil
UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: invasive and not recommended (South); caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (North, Central)

Uses: shade; deck or patio; specimen; espalier; fruit; container or planter; highway median

Figure 1. Full Form - Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry guava
Credits: UF/IFAS
Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry Guava

**Description**

- **Height**: 15 to 25 feet
- **Spread**: 10 to 25 feet
- **Crown uniformity**: irregular
- **Crown shape**: round, vase
- **Crown density**: moderate
- **Growth rate**: moderate
- **Texture**: medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement**: opposite/subopposite
- **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**: 1 ½ to 4 inches
**Leaf color**: dark green on top, paler green underneath
**Fall color**: no color change
**Fall characteristic**: not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color**: white
- **Flower characteristics**: showy; fragrant; emerges singly or in groups of 3 at leaf axis
- **Flowering**: year-round

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape**: round or obovoid
- **Fruit length**: 1 to 2 inches
- **Fruit covering**: fleshy berry
- **Fruit color**: purplish red
- **Fruit characteristics**: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem
- **Fruiting**: year-round

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/branches**: branches don’t droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
- **Bark**: gray to reddish brown, smooth, and peeling
- **Pruning requirement**: little required
- **Breakage**: resistant
- **Current year twig color**: green, brown
- **Current year twig thickness**: thin, medium
- **Wood specific gravity**: unknown

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Figure 2. Range

Figure 3. Leaf - *Psidium cattleianum*: Strawberry guava
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Figure 4. Fruit - *Psidium cattleianum*: Strawberry guava
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Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry Guava

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.

Strawberry 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-layering’s 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.

Additional References


Culture

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

Other

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

Figure 5. Bark - Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry guava
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS