

Myrcianthes fragrans: Simpson's Stopper¹

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Introduction

This member of the eucalyptus family is an attractive, hardy tropical. It was once known as *Eugenia simpsonii*. It can be a large shrub or small tree and can reach a height of 30 feet with a 20-foot spread. The tiny, dark green leaves contain aromatic oils with the fragrance of nutmeg. They grow densely, when in full sun, on the smooth-barked branches. When this plant is grown in shade, the foliage becomes less dense, and the trunk displays its attractive, smooth, exfoliating bark. Simpson's stopper has fragrant, white flowers that grow in long panicles which occur periodically throughout the year. These flowers then develop into attractive, red berries that are edible. The flowers attract many species of butterflies, and the fruits are appealing to birds, especially the state bird of Florida, the mockingbird.

General Information

Scientific name: *Myrcianthes fragrans*

Pronunciation: mer-see-ANTH-eez FRAY-granz

Common name(s): Simpson's stopper, twinberry

Family: *Myrtaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

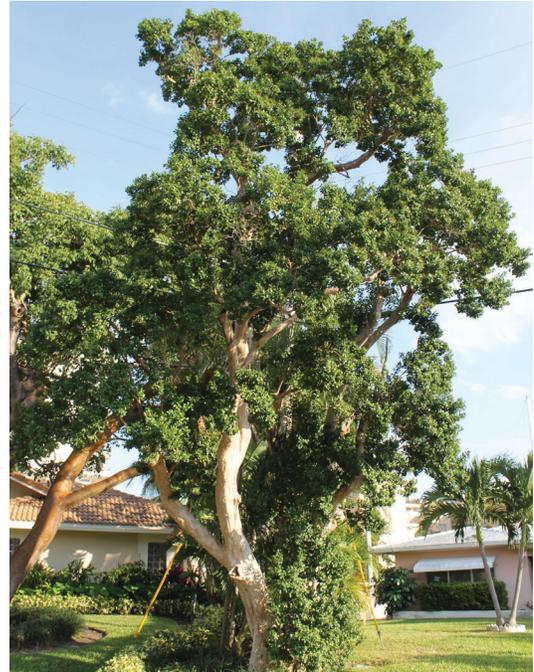


Figure 1. Full Form—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper

Origin: native to Florida, the West Indies, Mexico, and Central America

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet); medium-sized parking lot islands (100–200 square feet); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet); trained as a standard; mass planting; screen; attracts butterflies

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 20 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: fragrant

Leaf blade length: 1 to 2 inches

Leaf color: dark green on top, pale green underneath

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper



Figure 4. New Growth—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: fragrant; emerges in clusters on long-stalked cymes

Flowering: primarily spring, but also year-round



Figure 5. Flower—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ½ inch

Fruit cover: fleshy berry

Fruit color: green, turning red when ripe

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; attracts birds

Fruiting: spring and summer



Figure 6. Fruit—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk; no thorns; showy

Bark: smooth, gray, and flakes off in patches to reveal reddish inner bark

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin



Figure 7. Bark—*Myrcianthes fragrans*: Simpson's stopper
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay; well-drained to occasionally wet soil

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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

Use and Management

Simpson's stopper performs well with little or no irrigation once it becomes established. It is useful in roadway medians, along unmaintained highways or in buffer strips around parking lots. It can be trimmed into a nice, multi-trunked small tree for use near a deck or patio to provide shade to a small area. This configuration shows off the bark nicely.

Simpson's stopper can grow in full sun or deep shade and is most useful where the soils contain shell, marl, or lime rock (alkaline soils). This plant will tolerate wet soils but is also drought tolerant. It shears well, has a high salt tolerance, and is hardy to about 25°F. Its native habitat in Florida is the coastal upland forests with sandy soil containing shells and a neutral to slightly alkaline pH.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

References

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.