

Citharexylum spinosum: Fiddlewood¹

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Introduction

Normally seen as a shrub, fiddlewood can grow to about 35 feet tall in its native habitat in south Florida. The largest known specimen is in Dade County, FL. Leaves are unusually glossy with smooth margins and a distinctive bowed venation pattern. The plant produces several trunks which if left untrained, eventually gives rise to a multi-stemmed shrub or small tree. Small, white showy flowers produced in the summer months contrast nicely with the shiny foliage. Young plants can be upright and rounded; older specimens develop a rounded vase form with lower branches removed.

General Information

Scientific name: *Citharexylum spinosum*

Pronunciation: sith-ar-RECKS-sil-lum spy-NO-sum

Common name(s): fiddlewood

Family: *Verbenaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida, the West Indies, and South America

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: reclamation plant; hedge; screen; near a deck or patio; espalier; 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); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; border



Figure 1. Full Form—*Citharexylum spinosum*: Fiddlewood

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 15 to 35 feet

Spread: 8 to 25 feet

Plant habit: oval

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: spatulate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 6 inches

Leaf color: dark green to yellow on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Citharexylum spinosum*: Fiddlewood

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: flowers in summer months; fragrant; trumpet-shaped, and emerges in clusters on 3-12" long, terminal racemes

Flowering: most abundant in spring, but also year-round



Figure 4. Flower—*Citharexylum spinosum*: Fiddlewood

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ⅓ to ½ inch

Fruit cover: fleshy drupe

Fruit color: orange, turning reddish brown to almost black when ripe

Fruit characteristic: showy; only produced on female specimens

Fruiting: summer

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk

Bark: reddish brown, light brown, or gray, and becomes fissured with age

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium



Figure 5. Bark—*Citharexylum spinosum*: Fiddlewood
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Fiddlewood is tolerant of sandy, dry soil and adapts to a wide range of soil pH including alkaline. Moderate salt tolerance allows planting near the beach.

Pests and Diseases

Few insects or diseases bother fiddlewood.

Reference

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.

Culture

Light requirement: partial sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay; moist but well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: low

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

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: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Fiddlewood is most useful planted 6 to 8 feet apart as a screen or hedge plant along a property line. Its large size makes it suited for a tall hedge. The canopy on shade-grown plants becomes thin and irregular; those in full sun remain dense and cast deep shade in a small area. Fiddlewood makes a nice patio tree planted in the shade of pines or other tall trees. It will also be useful for planting in parking lot buffer strips, along highways and in other drafty sites receiving little if any irrigation once established.