

# *Schaefferia frutescens* Florida Boxwood<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Florida boxwood is usually found close to the tidewater area on sandy soil and hammocks. Although large specimens can grow to 30 feet tall, most are seen as small to medium-sized shrubs. Smallish leaves borne close together make the plant look similar to the well-known boxwood famous in English gardens. Leaves are yellow-green and rolled over slightly along the margins. Small, greenish white flowers are borne in the leaf axils in compact clusters. Fruits turn from green to yellow then bright red. The bark is smooth grey or brown. The yellow wood is used in boxes and for carving when it becomes available.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Schaefferia frutescens*: Florida boxwood.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Schaefferia frutescens*: Florida boxwood.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Schaefferia frutescens*

**Pronunciation:** sheff-FEER-ree-uh froo-TESS-senz

**Common name(s):** Florida boxwood

**Family:** *Celastraceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Figure 3)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year-round

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**Origin:** native to Florida

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

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

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Plant habit:** oval

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** greenish-white

**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** less than 0.5 inch

**Fruit cover:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** yellow

**Fruit characteristic:** persists on the plant

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

**Current year stem/twig color:** green

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** well-drained; alkaline; sand; loam; clay

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** good

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Florida boxwood can be planted in a row to form a nice hedge or screen. It takes to clipping well, making it suited for creating a formal appearance. Train the hedge wider at the bottom than the top to allow light to reach the bottom. This will help keep it dense. Larger plants can be trained into small, multi-trunked trees. Nursery operators can also train young plants into a standard with one trunk and a tight head of foliage. This is nicely suited for a formal landscape.

Florida boxwood is well-adapted to partial shade, making it a good candidate for planting along foundations and other areas receiving less than full-day sun. It grows well in slightly alkaline soil.

## Pests and Diseases

No problems appear to affect the growth or health of this plant.