

Bischofia javanica: Bishopwood¹

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Introduction

This rapidly growing evergreen or semi-evergreen tree can reach a height of 75 feet but usually is seen 30 to 50 feet tall in Florida, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The dense rounded crown and thick trunk makes bishopwood a popular shade tree. However, enough light will not penetrate for a lawn to grow underneath bishopwood trees but a groundcover will serve nicely, helping to cover the exposed tree roots. Branching is typically coarse with several large-diameter laterals originating fairly close to the ground. The shiny, bronze-toned, green trifoliate leaves are especially attractive when young and reach two to five inches in length. The stem will exude a milky sap when wounded. Small blue-black or reddish berries are produced in copious drooping clusters and drop to the ground creating a mess following the inconspicuous flowers on female trees. Unfortunately, the sex of the tree cannot be determined on young plants.

General Information

Scientific name: *Bischofia javanica*

Pronunciation: biss-CHOFF-ee-uh juh-VAN-ih-kuh

Common name(s): bishopwood, toog tree, bischofia

Family: *Phyllanthaceae*

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

Origin: native to tropical Asia and the Pacific Island



Figure 1. Full Form - *Bischofia javanica*: bishopwood
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UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (North, Central, South)

Uses: not recommended for planting



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 50 feet

Spread: 25 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Figure 3)

Leaf type: trifoliate, odd-pinnately compound; made up of 3 leaflets



Figure 3. Leaf - *Bischofia javanica*: bishopwood
Credits: UF/IFAS

Leaf margin: serrulate

Leaf shape: ovate, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: leaflets are 2 to 5 inches

Leaf color: green or bronze green on top, lighter green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: greenish yellow

Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges in clusters on hanging panicles

Flowering: early fall



Figure 4. Flower - *Bischofia javanica*: bishopwood
Credits: UF/IFAS

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ¼ to ½ inch

Fruit covering: fleshy, berry-like schizocarp

Fruit color: brownish-orange

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem



Figure 5. Fruit - *Bischofia javanica*: bishopwood

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Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: gray or brown, with thin vertical fissures that look platey with age

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark - *Bischofia javanica*: bishopwood

Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Growing in full sun on various soil types, Bishopwood is very easily grown and grows quickly. It has only moderate salt tolerance. It appears to grow well in confined urban soil spaces, however, the fruit is considered messy and stains walks when it drops to the ground and the seeds often germinate in the landscape and could become a nuisance. Aggressive roots can lift sidewalks if they are planted within five or six feet of the walk. If you plant this tree, locate it in a lawn area where regular mowing will kill the sprouting seedlings, not in a landscape bed. The tree is not generally recommended for street tree planting and can be a nuisance in lawns as surface roots make mowing difficult close to the trunk. Branches reportedly break from the tree on occasion. There are too many other high quality trees available in USDA hardiness zones 10 and 11 to encourage planting this tree.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Pests

Bishopwood suffers from severe scale infestations, especially false Oleander scale which is followed by sooty mold.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern, except root rot.

References

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