

Melaleuca viminalis: Weeping Bottlebrush¹

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean²

Introduction

This popular evergreen tree has a dense, multi-trunked, low-branching, pendulous growth habit and a moderate growth rate. Mature specimens can reach 25- to 30-feet tall in 30 years, but most trees are seen 15- to 20-feet high and wide. The narrow, light green, 3- to 4-inch-long leaves tend to grow only at the ends of the long, hanging branches, creating a weeping effect. The cylindrical, bright scarlet blooms, three to five inches long and 1-inch wide, are composed of multiple, long, bristle-like stamens. These blooms appear in great abundance March through July, less so throughout the year. The flowers are followed by persistent woody capsules that are not noticed unless you are close to the tree.

General Information

Scientific name: *Melaleuca viminalis*

Pronunciation: mel-uh-loo-kuh vim-min-NAY-liss

Common name(s): Weeping bottlebrush

Family: *Myrtaceae*

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

Origin: native to the east coast of Australia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended (North, Central); caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South)

Uses: hedge; deck or patio; specimen; screen; container or planter; street without sidewalk; parking lot island < 100 sq. ft.; parking lot island 100–200 sq. ft.; parking lot island > 200 sq. ft.; tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft. wide; highway median



Figure 1. Full Form—*Melaleuca viminalis*: Weeping bottlebrush

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 20 feet

Spread: 15 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: weeping, round

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: lanceolate, linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 3 to 4 inches

Leaf color: pale green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Melaleuca viminalis*: Weeping bottlebrush

Flower

Flower color: bright red

Flower characteristics: very showy; numerous stamens that emerge in clusters on long spikes

Flowering: spring, summer, and sometimes into early winter



Figure 4. Flower—*Melaleuca viminalis*: Weeping bottlebrush

Fruit

Fruit shape: round; cup-like capsule

Fruit length: < ½ inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

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



Figure 5. Fruit—*Melaleuca viminalis*: Weeping bottlebrush

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: dark gray, furrowed, and shaggy or exfoliating in vertical strips

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: gray

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Melaleuca viminalis*: Weeping bottlebrush

Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; well drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Weeping bottlebrushes should be grown in full sun, preferably on moist, well drained soil. Although they can tolerate some drought, best flowering and growth is obtained with ample moisture and regular fertilization. Be sure the soil drains well, as roots often rot in wet soil. The brittle wood of weeping bottlebrush may make it unsuitable for windy areas, but this is usually not a problem in most locations. They are not suitable for street tree planting due to the weeping growth habit, but will make nice plantings along streets in wide medians. Lower branches can be removed so cars can fit beneath in parking lots, where the trees grow well in the restricted soil space. Occasional pruning of pendulous branches will be required for vehicle clearance. One of the best uses is for lawn specimens, or screens on large properties, with a regular maintenance program.

The cultivar 'Red Cascade' has large red flowers in spring and fall. *Melaleuca citrinis* and *Melaleuca rigidus* are hardy in the southern part of USDA hardiness zone 8b.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Pests

Mites and witches broom can be troublesome.

Diseases

Root rot in wet soil, and canker. A twig gall, formed in response to a fungus (*Sphaeropsis tumefacens*), can disfigure the tree. The tree is often short-lived due to disease.

References

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