Myrcianthes fragrans

Family: Myrtaceae

Simpson’s Stopper; Twinberry

Synonyms (Discarded names): Anamomis fragrans; Eugenia fragrans; E. simpsonii; Myrtus fragrans

Origin: South Florida; Bahamas; Caribbean; Mexico through Central America to Colombia and Venezuela

U.S.D.A. Zone: 9b-11 (25°F minimum)

Growth Rate: Slow

Plant Type: Shrub to small tree

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen

Flowering Months: Primarily late winter, spring and intermittently

Light Requirements: High; medium

Salt Tolerance: High

Drought Tolerance: High once established

Soil Requirements: Well-drained, occasionally wet

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Major Potential Pests: None

Typical Dimensions: 20-30’ high by 15-20’ wide

Propagation: Seeds or cuttings

Human hazards: None

Uses: Small tree; parking lot island; roadway median; hedge, screen; mass planting; butterfly and wildlife attractor

Distribution

Simpson’s stopper is native to South Florida where it was originally found in scattered hammocks near the coast. However, it has adapted well to landscapes and gardens in northern Florida and along the Atlantic coast up to Charleston, South Carolina. Although native to the Caribbean, it is nevertheless rare in Puerto Rico, and more common on the other Caribbean islands. The Island of Mayaguana in Southern Bahamas still retains forests of Simpson’s Stopper growing on elevated rocky ridges.
**Growth Habit**
Simpson’s stopper is a multi-stemmed shrub or small tree with a densely branched and densely leafy evergreen crown. The crown varies from narrow and subcolumnar to wider than the plant is tall. It is distinguished by a trunk with flaking outer bark, a reddish brown inner bark, and a smooth mottled tan-gray trunk after bark exfoliation. The exfoliated bark is somewhat like the introduced guava, *Psidium guajava*. The tree will typically grow to about 25 feet in Florida and develops a buttressed base with age.

**Cultivars**
Seedling form Simpson’s stopper can be selected for a range of features including reddish new foliate, smaller leaves, better form, and compact shape. The ‘Compacta’ form is a lower growing shrub to 5 feet and can be used in smaller landscape setting or as foundation plants.

**Leaves**
The leaves are simple, entire and opposite with a short petiole. The blade is elliptic to obovate, thick and leathery and between 1 to 2 inches long and 0.5 to 1.25 inches wide. The upper surface is shiny green, and the lower surface is dull light green. New leaves may range in color from pale chartreuse to deep wine red. The blade may curl under at the margins and the apex is either blunt or rounded and sometimes notched. It is covered with tiny gland dots that emit a pleasant fragrance when crushed. The side veins are inconspicuous.

**Flower and Fruit**
Simpson’s stopper flowers in light to heavy flushes throughout the year. The heaviest bloom however begins in February, spring, or early summer. The flowers are fragrant, small, showy, pure white, and clustered in cymes. There are 4 concave white petals and many white spreading stamens giving the plant a fuzzy appearance when in bloom. Heavy flowering is followed by fruiting. The fruit is a red berry, 2-seeded, and approximately 1/3 inches round. The fruit is borne singly but more often in clusters of 2-4 and is edible. Blue jays, cardinals and the mockingbirds, the state bird of Florida, feed on the fruit. The plant’s dense canopy also provides shelter for the birds. Butterflies as well as bees are also attracted to Simpson’s stopper.
Leaves
Mid-March

Leaves and newly formed flower buds
Mid-April

Flowers
Late-February

Flowers
Late-April

Unripe fruits
Early March

Fruits
Early March
**Uses**

Simpson’s stopper is commonly used as a hedge, specimen or tree. It is tolerant of highly alkaline calcareous soils. Thus it is well adapted for South Florida parking lots, and landscapes composed of filled soils mined from calcareous rocks well below the soil’s surface. Florida Department of Transportation has approved Simpson’s stopper as a frangible tree. This provide many more opportunities to use Simpson’s stopper on roadway landscape projects. It is especially useful in the narrow center medians where only frangible trees and plants are allowed.
**Planting and Maintenance Guidelines**

In South Florida, Simpson’s stopper can be planted year-round. It is a slow grower. It grows to about 25 feet tall but only at a rate of 6 inches to a foot per year. The plant will tolerate alkaline and wet soils but it is also drought tolerant. However, within the first 4 years after planting, the tree may show signs of drought stress during extended dry periods. Thus, it should be sufficiently irrigated during the dry seasons of its early years. Once established, it requires little or no irrigation. Simpson’s stopper will grow well in either sun or medium shade. It grows densely in full sun and is taller on a more loosely branched when grown in shade. It has a high salt tolerance, and is hardy to about 25°F. It has survived 17°F with very little tip burn. Simpson’s stopper shears well. It tolerates severe shearing making it suitable for use as a hedge, bonsai, topiary or grown on the patio in a large container. To develop a hedge, space plants 36-60 inches apart. When used as a hedge, flowering and fruiting may be curtailed if it is trimmed too frequently. Simpson’s stopper is an evergreen and is not messy in the landscape.

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**Pests**

**Guava rust disease** (*Puccinia psidii*) is an ornamental plant disease which attacks stressed Simpson’s stopper plants. Usually fungus is associated with wet conditions, but guava rust will thrive in South Florida’s cool winter periods where there is little rainfall. The fungus is evident by the rusty spores on new growth and young leaves. It causes dieback. The disease is rarely encountered on Simpson’s stopper but is more prevalent on Eugenia. A fungicide labeled for this disease on ornamentals may be applied. Once the heat of summer arrives, the pathogen becomes less active.
References


Useful Links
South Florida Native Plant Fact Sheets
Native Plants for Home Landscapes
Florida Native Landscaping
Ornamental Trees for South Florida
Small Trees for South Florida
‘Shady Lady’ Black Olive
FYN Publications

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