

Psidium littorale: Cattley Guava¹

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Introduction

This upright, multi-branched, evergreen shrub or small tree has many features which make it a popular landscape choice. Unfortunately, Cattley Guava has escaped cultivation and has infested ditch banks and other wild areas in south Florida, and its use should be tempered. Capable of reaching 25 feet in height but often seen at 10 to 15 feet, the thick, smooth, dark green, four-inch-long, leathery leaves nicely complement the smooth, grey-brown to golden bark which attractively peels off in thin sheets. The single, white, one-inch-diameter flowers have many prominent stamens and look like powderpuffs in miniature. The blooms appear heaviest in April but can open sporadically throughout the year.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Psidium littorale*: Cattley Guava
Credits: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Psidium littorale*

Pronunciation: SID-ee-um lit-aw-RAY-lee

Common name(s): Cattley Guava, Strawberry Guava

Family: *Myrtaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: invasive non-native

Uses: shade; deck or patio; specimen; espalier; fruit; container or planter; highway median

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 12 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: round, vase

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Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: obovate, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, round
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch, 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green, brown
Current year twig thickness: thin, medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The 1.5-inch-diameter, bright red, pear-shaped fruits ripen to a very dark red in July and are a popular treat - for people and wildlife. Birds, raccoons, and squirrels all love the delicious, sweet-tart, white flesh and will widely spread the small, grape-like seeds. The abundant, fallen fruits may be messy on hard surfaces such as walks and cars, and trees should probably not be planted along residential streets or over sidewalks or patios. It would make a good small boulevard or median street tree and accents an area with its well-shaped canopy and interesting trunk form. It combines well with other plants in a shrub border and provides both food and cover for wildlife.

Cattle Guava grows well in full sun or partial shade on a wide range of soils, including sand or clay, but fruit quality is improved on rich soils. Plants are drought-tolerant once established but benefit from a thick, organic mulch. Any necessary pruning should be done after fruiting. Pick the fruit for eating before the fruit fly larvae discover it.

Psidium littorale var. *littorale*, Lemon Guava, is slower-growing and has large yellow fruits with delightful, spicy flavor.

Propagation is by air-layerings or by seeds. Seeds germinate easily and rapidly. Seedling plants take seven or eight years to bear fruit.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Fruit fly larvae devour the fruit but do no harm to the tree.