

Brunfelsia spp: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, Brunfelsia¹

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This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.

Introduction

Brunfelsia is a genus of around 50 species of plants that belong to the nightshade family (*Solanaceae*). Plants in this family contain toxic compounds (see “Other” section). Brunfelsia species are native to South America, and the most common species cultivated and sold are *B. grandiflora*, *B. pauciflora*, and *B. australis*. These species differ in their growth dimensions, flower sizes, and cold hardiness. *B. australis* is larger and more cold hardy than other species, *B. pauciflora* has a smaller shrub-like growth habit, and *B. grandiflora* is a medium size species with large flowers. *Brunfelsia americana* is a species often found at specialty nurseries. Other species are available in the horticultural trade.

Brunfelsia is an evergreen shrub with a dense, upright growth habit (Figure 1). It grows to about 8 or 10 feet tall (varies depending upon species selection) and is best known for its beautiful flower display. Brunfelsia is also called ‘yesterday, today, and tomorrow’ because the fragrant flowers gradually change color each day the flower is open. The color begins as a deep violet, followed by pale lavender, and finally turns white before falling. This color change is caused by a degradation of pigments within the petals (Figure 2). This plant blooms from spring through summer, so flowers in each color stage may be seen on the plant. In south Florida, plants fill with flowers during the warm months of the year. Flowering is restricted to the summer and fall in the northern part of its range. The large ovate evergreen leaves persist throughout the year (Figure 3). Fruits are green, round, and contain toxic compounds (Figure 4).

Brunfelsia is well suited to a variety of uses in the landscape including in a specimen or accent, used as a foundation plant or planted in mass, or used as a screen or

standard. The evergreen leaves and ornamentally interesting, fragrant flowers bring added interest to the landscape. This plant attracts pollinators and is resistant to browsing by deer or rabbits.

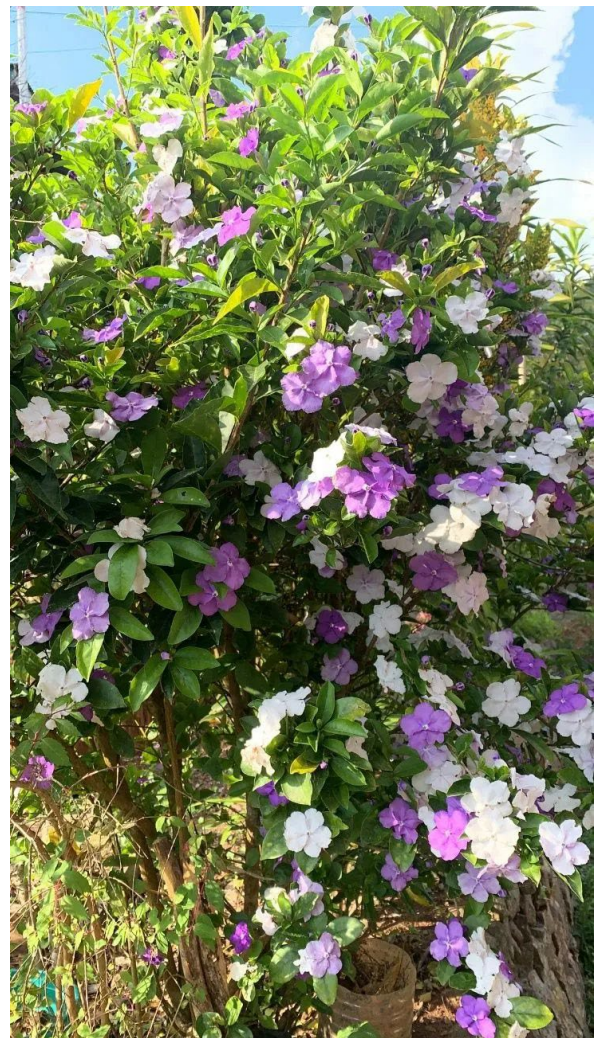


Figure 1. Full form—*Brunfelsia grandiflora*: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Credit: © ni_colo, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Flower—*Brunfelsia* spp.: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Leaf—*Brunfelsia grandiflora*: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS

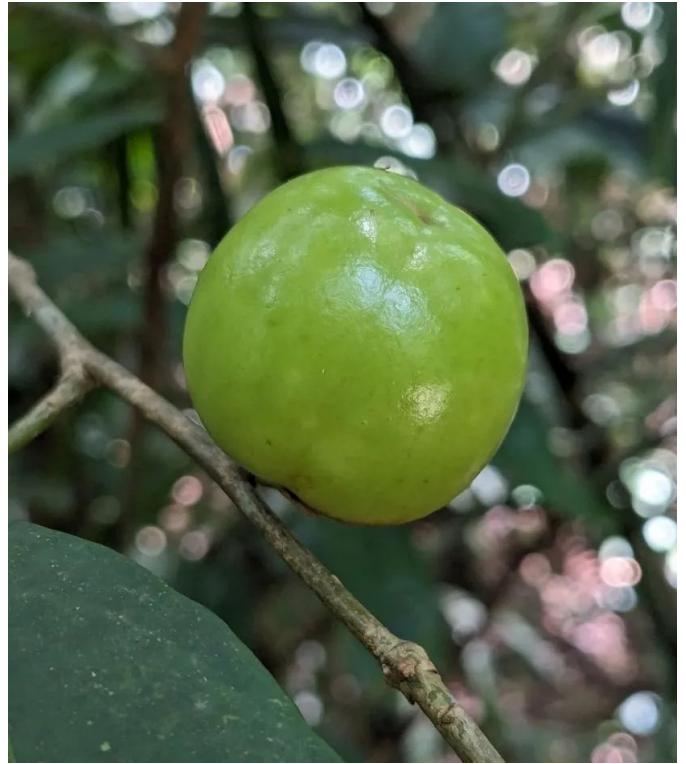


Figure 4. Fruit—*Brunfelsia guianensis*: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

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General Information

Scientific name: *Brunfelsia* spp.

Pronunciation: brun-FELZ-ee-uh species

Common name(s): yesterday, today, and tomorrow; Brunfelsia; raintree; lady of the night; kiss-me-quick

Family: *Solanaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

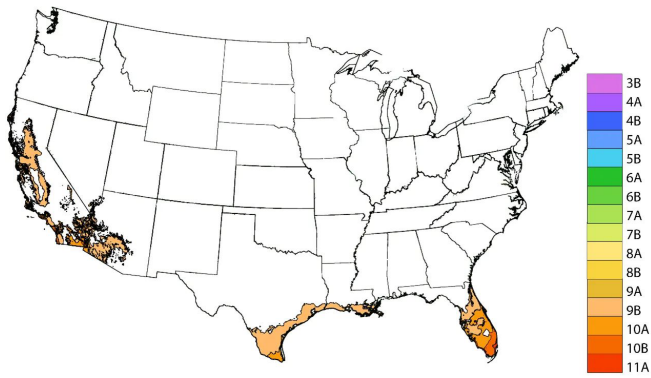


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

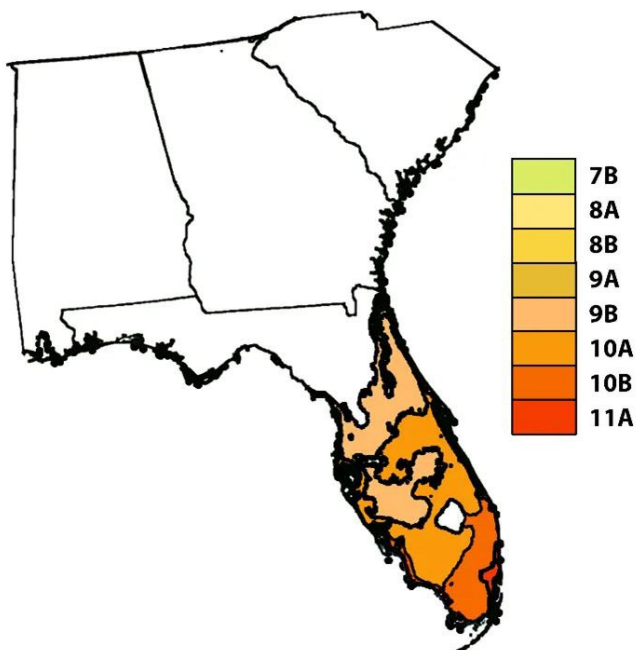


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: specimen; accent; border; foundation; mass planting; screen; trained as a standard

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 7 to 10 feet, dependent upon species selection

Spread: 5 to 8 feet, dependent upon species selection

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: lavender; purple; white

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering; flowering time dependent upon species selection; showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy; toxic

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multitrunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: brown

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: evergreen leaves add winter interest

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Toxicity: this plant has medium toxic characteristics; all parts of the plant contain brunfelsamidine and toxic alkaloids; ingestion causes neurological and gastroenteric issues

Use and Management

Brunfelsia is adaptable to a variety of site conditions. This plant performs best when planted in partial shade but may tolerate full sun in certain locations. Soil should be well drained and high in organic matter. This plant may require pruning to maintain a height around 8 feet. Care should be taken when locating this plant in the landscape, as it exhibits medium toxic characteristics.

Propagation is via stem cuttings taken during spring or summer.

Design Considerations

Brunfelsia is a flowering showstopper, prized for its fragrant blossoms that transition from deep violet to lavender and finally to white. Its captivating display makes it a superb choice as a standalone specimen plant, an informal screen, or a centerpiece in a mixed shrub border where its bloom cycle can be fully appreciated. For a layered underplanting that hides occasionally bare lower stems, use the fine textures of macho fern and the strappy leaves of variegated liriope or flax lily. To highlight its dark green foliage, add the bold, striped leaves of variegated ginger. White-flowering companions such as gardenias or pentas echo the final stage of their bloom, while the sky-blue flowers of plumbago provide a cool counterpoint to the purple blossoms.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

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