Byrsonima lucida: Locustberry[1]

Keighly Graves, Wendy Wilber, Tom Wichman, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein[2]

https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/

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

Locustberry (*Byrsonima lucida*) is an evergreen shrub native to the pine rocklands and rockland hammock habitats of south Florida. In the pinelands of Florida where nutrients are not abundant, it will grow to a height of 1 foot. However, it can reach a height of 8 to 10 feet in the hammocks where soils are richer (Figure 1). The branching habit of the locustberry is quite irregular, and the shrub is often a host to epiphytes. The evergreen foliage is obovate, glossy, and less than 2 inches long (Figure 2). The spring flowers of this plant occur in clusters and change colors with time. These flowers turn from white to pink to crimson (Figure 3). The oil glands on the underside of the petals also change color and turn from green to yellow. The beautiful colors of the flowers attract different species of butterflies. Locustberry is the larval hostplant for the Florida duskywing butterfly (*Ephyriades brunnea floridensis*). The fruit of this plant is a drupe, which turns from green to red-brown once mature (Figure 4). Locustberry is on the threatened plant list in Florida. Locustberry is well-suited for use as a specimen, with its showy multi-hued flowers, which also make a great addition to pollinator gardens. It may also be used as a screen, border, or in reclamation planting.



Figure 1. Full form—*Byrsonima lucida*: locustberry. Credit: linac © Lina, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Byrsonima lucida*: locustberry. Credit: © Noah Frade, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Byrsonima lucida*: locustberry.
Credit: © Fran Wiesner, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Byrsonima lucida*: locustberry.
Credit: © Oscar Johnson, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist

General Information

Scientific name: *Byrsonima lucida*

Pronunciation: bur-SO-nim-uh LOO-sid-uh

Common name(s): locustberry, candleberry, gooseberry

Family: *Malpighiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

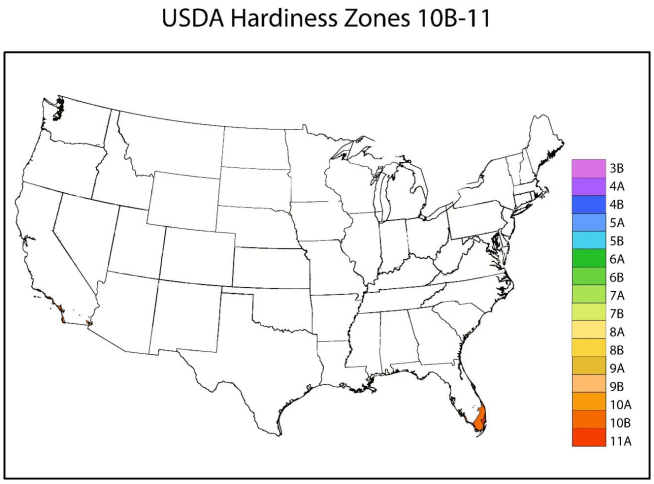


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 10B–11; 11B not pictured but within planting zone.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

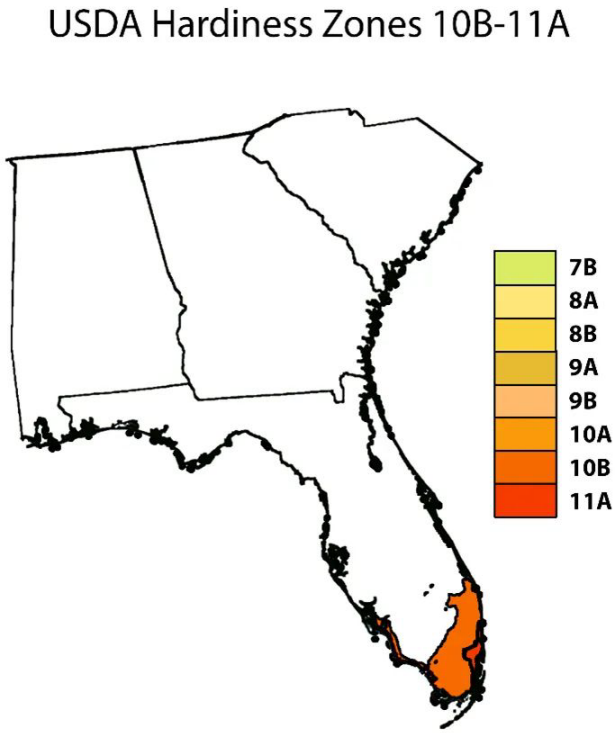


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 10B–11A; 11B not pictured but within planting zone.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: reclamation plant; screen; border; attracts butterflies; specimen

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 5 to 20 feet

Spread: 5 to 30 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: obovate; spatulate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white; pink; crimson; yellow

Flower characteristic: winter flowering; spring flowering; summer flowering; showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: green; red-brown when mature

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds; persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: good (aerosolized, not direct salt spray)

Plant spacing: plant on 10-foot centers

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Locustberry should be planted in a full sun to partial shaded location. This plant naturally occurs in habitats with lime rock or soils with high organic matter. It is easily adaptable to different well-drained soils and is very drought tolerant. Locustberry has good tolerance to aerosolized salt but should not be located where it would receive direct salt spray. It is an endangered plant in Florida. The evergreen foliage and showy, multi-hued flowers make locustberry a nice addition to the landscape. It may be used as a large shrub or small tree, may be used as a border, and has a screening effect when planted in groups. This plant can also take on a bonsai appearance with proper pruning.

Design Considerations

Locustberry is a superb native shrub for South Florida, prized for its exceptional toughness and wildlife value. It is the sole larval host for the Florida duskywing butterfly, a vital nectar source for countless pollinators, and its berries are a favorite of songbirds.

In the landscape, this evergreen shrub provides year-round structure. Growing 5 to 20 feet tall, it can be used as a striking specimen, a dense informal screen, or part of a mixed native hedge. It also trains well into an attractive multi-trunked tree, perfect for courtyards and small yards.

Pair locustberry with other durable South Florida natives. Good companions include coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*) for low-level texture, saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) for bold form, and firebush (*Hamelia patens*) or Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) to add more layers of habitat for hummingbirds and songbirds.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or disease issues of major concern.

[1] This document is FPS81, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised December 2025. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/*.

[2] Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Wendy Wilber, state program coordinator and Extension agent IV, UF/IFAS Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program; Tom Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Claire Lewis, state specialized agent II and director Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Horticultural Sciences; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that operate in compliance with applicable federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, Dean for UF/IFAS Extension.