

# *Capparis cynophallophora* Jamaican Caper<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

This 6 to 20 foot-tall, native shrub is an upright to spreading plant that is related to plants producing edible capers. The evergreen leaves of the Jamaica caper are light green above, with fine brown scales below. These glossy, oval leaves are folded together when they first emerge and give the plant's new growth a bronze appearance. The leaves also have a notched tip. Twigs are brownish gray and pubescent. Jamaica caper flowers have very showy, two-inch-long, purple stamens, white anthers, and white petals. The inflorescence is comprised of terminal clusters consisting of 3 to 10 individual flowers. The fruits are 3 to 8 inch long cylindrical pods containing small brown seeds that are embedded in a scarlet pulp.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Capparis cynophallophora*

**Pronunciation:** KAP-ar-riss sin-oh-fal-oh-FOR-uh

**Common name(s):** Jamaican caper

**Family:** *Capparidaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10 through 11 (Figure 3)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round



Figure 1. Leaf—*Capparis cynophallophora*: Jamaican Caper  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** near a deck or patio; screen; border; attracts butterflies; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus; Ryan W. Klein, assistant professor; and Gail Hansen, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Leaf—*Capparis cynophallophora*: Jamaican Caper  
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Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.  
Credits: undefined

## Description

**Height:** 6 to 15 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 12 feet

**Plant habit:** vase shape

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** obovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** pod or pod-like

**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches

**Fruit cover:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** unknown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

## Trunk and Branches

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

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

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

## Use and Management

Jamaica caper can be utilized as an understory tree in the partial shade. Train the plant into a tree by removing low, drooping branches, and heading upright branches to thicken their diameter. It can also be clipped into a hedge or tall screen to block an undesirable view.

Grow *Capparis cynophallophora* in an area that receives full sun to medium shade. This plant performs well in soils with good drainage and can tolerate cold temperatures to 28°F. It is also drought resistant and responds to fertilizer with vigorous growth.

Propagate the Jamaica caper by seeds.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.