

Persea borbonia: Redbay¹

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Introduction

This handsome North American native evergreen tree can reach 50 feet in height with a comparable spread but is often seen somewhat shorter and wider, particularly when grown in the open in an urban area. The glossy, leathery, medium to dark green, six-inch leaves emit a spicy fragrance when crushed and the inconspicuous, springtime flower clusters are followed by small, dark blue fruits which ripen in fall. These fruits are enjoyed by birds and squirrels and add to the tree's overall attractiveness. The trunk bears very showy, ridged, red-brown bark and frequently branches low to the ground forming a multi-stemmed habit similar to live oak, but it can be pruned to make a single, short central leader which would be most suitable for many urban plantings.



Figure 1. Full form—*Persea borbonia*: redbay.
Credit: UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Persea borbonia*

Pronunciation: PER-see-uh bor-BOE-nee-uh

Common name(s): redbay

Family: *Lauraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to the southeastern United States and the Bahamas

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: deck or patio; shade; specimen; street without sidewalk; reclamation; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

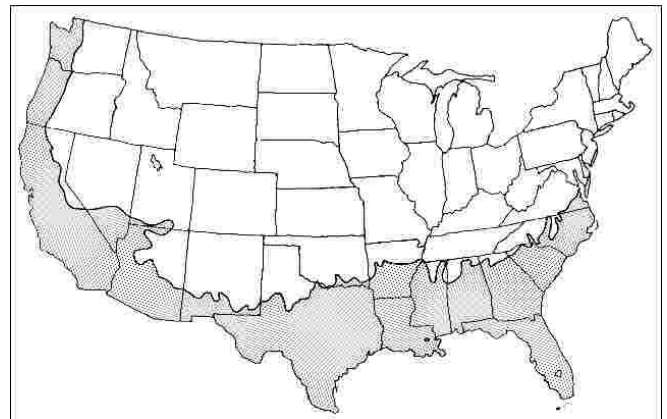


Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 50 feet

Spread: 30 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: spreading, round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate, lanceolate, oblong, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf
evergreen, fragrant

Leaf blade length: 2 to 6 inches

Leaf color: medium to dark green on top, pale and
glaucous underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Persea borbonia*: redbay.

Credit: UF/IFAS

Flower

Flower color: greenish

Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges in branched
clusters from leaf axils

Flowering: summer

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: 1/3 to 1/2 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy drupe

Fruit color: dark blue

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a
litter problem

Fruiting: summer

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one
trunk; no thorns

Bark: dark reddish brown, with shallow ridges and
irregular furrows

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic;
occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Thriving on little care in full sun or partial shade, Redbay can tolerate a wide range of soils, from hot and dry to wet and swampy. Redbay is a rugged and adaptable plant suitable to many landscape applications. Unfortunately, the wood is reportedly brittle and subject to wind damage. Pruning to keep lateral branches less than half the diameter of the trunk will increase the tree's longevity and help prevent branches from separating from the trunk. The

densely-foliated, spreading branches create a lush, billowy, rounded canopy making Redbay a wonderful shade tree. It can make a nice street tree planted on 20 to 25-foot centers but be sure to prune it properly as mentioned above. Plant with caution where cars will park or near sidewalks since birds love the fruit and often visit the tree, leaving their droppings on cars. The fruit can also be messy on cars and walks. Its ease of growth and neat, dense crown habit also make Redbay ideal for the low-maintenance and naturalized landscape. The dark brown, furrowed bark is particularly attractive on older specimens.

Propagation is by seed which germinate readily after several months in the ground.

Pests and Diseases

Redbay is occasionally bothered by twig dieback. This can be caused by a boring insect which bores inside a small twig causing the leaves on the end of the twig to turn brown and hang on the tree. This can be bothersome to a nursery operator, but usually only causes cosmetic damage to landscape trees. Insect-caused galls can distort and disfigure the leaves but do not significantly harm the tree. Scale insects occasionally infest the twigs or leaves, followed by sooty mold.

Redbay Ambrosia Beetle-Laurel Wilt Disease (RAB-LW) is a major threat to redbay and related tree species.

Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

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