Euonymus japonica

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Introduction

Spindle-Tree is a loose, spreading shrub that can grow to 15 feet in height, but is most commonly seen about 6- to 8-feet-tall (Fig. 1). The most outstanding feature of this large shrub is its red-orange fruit borne in the fall. The showy fruits are scarlet capsules that crack open in the fall to display their scarlet seeds, and a plant in heavy fruit is lovely. The dark green, deciduous foliage changes to a showy, bright red color in the fall. This plant has 1/2-inch-wide, greenish-white, inconspicuous flowers that occur from May until June.

General Information

Scientific name: Euonymus japonica
Pronunciation: yoo-AW-nim-us juh-PAW-nick-uh
Common name(s): Japanese Euonymus, Spindle-Tree
Family: Celastraceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 10A (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 7: year round
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: border; mass planting; screen; container or above-ground planter; near a deck or patio; espalier
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 6 to 15 feet
Spread: 3 to 5 feet
Plant habit: upright; oval
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Figure 1. Japanese Euonymus.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: serrate  
Leaf shape: ovate  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous; semi-evergreen  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: variegated  
Fall color: orange  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: greenish-white  
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: oval  
Fruit length: less than .5 inch  
Fruit cover: dry or hard  
Fruit color: red  
Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; attracts birds

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
Current year stem/twig color: green  
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

**Culture**

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade  
Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Soil salt tolerances: poor  
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches
Other

- **Roots:** usually not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- **Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding
- **Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive
- **Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

The Spindle-Tree is excellent for naturalizing and gives a stunning effect when massed or planted in a row. It can be used as a specimen or foundation plant (if it is regularly clipped) and creates a nice border or hedge.

Spindle-Tree will tolerate different types of well-drained soils but does not tolerate drought well; water and mulch the ground beneath the canopy for best growth. It grows in sun or shade, putting on the best fall color in full sun. Some shade from the afternoon sun in the southern part of its range is beneficial. The plant will withstand heavy pruning and has been used as a hedge for many years. Spindle-Tree transplants well when balled and burlapped or from containers.

The seeds should be cold stratified for 1 to 3 months, and cuttings can be taken anytime the plant is in leaf.

Pests and Diseases

Extreme susceptibility to Euonymus scale and crown gall makes this a high maintenance plant in some landscapes. Both of these problems are of considerable importance, therefore some feel this plant is not garden worthy.