Ardisia escallonioides
Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

Marlberry is a 12- to 15-foot-tall shrub native to Florida and the Caribbean region that has a very important place in planting design. It often occurs naturally with Sabal Palms and Stoppers. The dark green, semiglossy leaves of this shrub are 3 to 4 ½ inches long. The small, white, fragrant flowers occur in dense terminal panicles that are 5 inches in length. Flowers are borne at intervals throughout the year but do not last very long. In the late spring this plant bears its small purple fruit.

General Information

Scientific name: Ardisia escallonioides
Pronunciation: ar-DIZ-ee-uh ess-kal-lon-ee-OY-deez
Common name(s): Marlberry, Marbleberry
Family: Myrsinaceae
Plant type: tree
USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 1)
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: native to Florida
Uses: hedge; near a deck or patio; specimen; screen; attracts butterflies; border
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 12 to 20 feet
Spread: 6 to 12 feet
Plant habit: oval
Plant density: symmetrical habit with a regular (or smooth) outline and individuals having more or less identical forms
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Ardisia escallonioides  -- Marlberry

October 1999

Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Fruit characteristic:** suited for human consumption; attracts birds

**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy; no thorns

*Current year stem/twig color:* green

*Current year stem/twig thickness:* medium

**Culture**

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

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

*Drought tolerance:* moderate

*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

*Invasive potential:* not known to be invasive

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

**Use and Management**

Marlberry is great in mixed group and background plantings. It can be trained into a small tree by removing lower foliage and branches to expose the interesting trunk pattern. The multiple trunks become an interesting element in the landscape, and they look nice lighted at night. Space them 15 feet apart along an entrance road or sidewalk to create a nice linear planting of multi-trunked small trees. Since they will remain quite dense even in the partial shade, they make a great screen for residential landscapes.

This shrub prefers well-drained soils and a semi-shade to full sun location in the landscape. It will grow in soils with a wide pH range from a sandy humus to calcareous shell and is fast growing.
Marlberry is easily propagated from seed.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.