Breynia disticha
Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

Snowbush is a rounded shrub that is used primarily for its attractive foliage (Fig. 1). This 5- to 8-foot-tall, vase-shaped to rounded plant has variegated leaves with white, green and red coloration. Plants appear to differ in foliage coloration with some showing almost whitish new growth and others with a white and green variegation. The simple leaves are somewhat two-ranked and could appear to be pinnately compound at first glance. The red branches of this shrub are slender, wiry and appear to zig-zag. Snowbush has green, petal-less flowers that occur in axillary clusters on long peduncles; the flowers are mostly inconspicuous due to the striking foliage. The fruits are red berries that are 3/8 inch wide.

General Information

Scientific name: Breynia disticha
Pronunciation: BRAY-nee-uh DISS-stick-uh
Common name(s): Snowbush
Family: Euphorbiaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: specimen; superior hedge; suitable for growing indoors; border; foundation; mass planting; cascading down a wall
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 5 to 8 feet
Spread: 4 to 7 feet
Plant habit: round
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium
Foliage
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: ovate; obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: purple or red; variegated; pink
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
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: reddish
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

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

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

October 1999
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

This shrub may be used as a specimen and accent, and it also forms a nice hedge. Given enough room to expand its canopy, a single, unpruned specimen forms an attractive vase shape. It can also make for an accent in a shrub border. Branches are flexible enough to drape over a wall.

Snowbush will grow well on a wide range of soils but requires a full sun position in the landscape to maintain dense growth. This plant is tolerant of light, sandy soils but will not tolerate salt. Vigorous growth with regular, light fertilizer applications allows the new foliage to show its true charm.

Snowbush may be propagated by cuttings and sucker divisions.

Pests and Diseases

Although caterpillars and mites may be troublesome pests for Snowbush, this plant is not susceptible to any major diseases.