



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Euphorbia milii*¹

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Introduction

The Crown-of-Thorns is a Madagascar native shrub that can reach a height of 5 feet with an equal spread (Fig. 1). Cultivars have been selected and made available with mature heights ranging from 1 to 5 feet. The prostrate cultivars grow in a spreading fashion and can be used as a ground cover. The leaves that are present on this plant are restricted to the new growth, and they fall off quickly to reveal a stem with 1-inch-long straight thorns. This sprawling plant blooms throughout the year. The tiny, axillary flowers occur in cymes and have bright red, showy bracts. White, yellow, and pink flowered forms are also produced, but these are less common than red. The fruits are small capsules that are rarely formed in Florida.

General Information

Scientific name: *Euphorbia milii*

Pronunciation: yoo-FOR-bee-uh MIL-ee-eye

Common name(s): Crown-of-Thorns

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Plant type: ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: ground cover; edging; mass planting; cascading down a wall

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

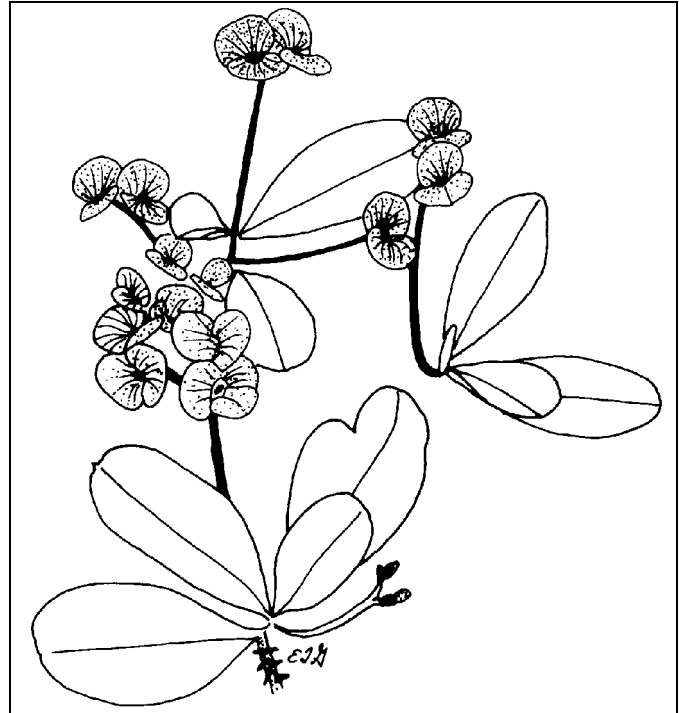


Figure 1. Crown-of-Thorns.

Description

Height: 2 to 5 feet

Spread: 3 to 5 feet

Plant habit: upright; spreading

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** spiral
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** spatulate
- Leaf venation:** pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

Flower

- Flower color:** red; white; yellow
- Flower characteristic:** year-round flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** unknown
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- 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
- Current year stem/twig color:** brown
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** very thick

Culture

- Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam;
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Soil salt tolerances:** good
- Plant spacing:** 24 to 36 inches

Other

- Roots:** not applicable
- Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
- 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

Euphorbia milii can be grown in the landscape as a dwarf shrub or ground cover. It is attractive as an edging and may also be used as a foundation or container plant. This plant is excellent for ocean-front plantings and is common in rock gardens, requiring little or no irrigation after it is established.

The Crown-of-Thorns will grow best when placed in an area of the landscape that receives full sun or partial shade and no irrigation once established. Well-drained soils are essential to successfully grow this plant. Crown-of-Thorns is able to withstand adverse conditions, but it will not tolerate overwatering and overfertilization.

The Crown-of-Thorns may be propagated from cuttings taken in the spring and summer.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Mealy bugs may be a problem for this plant when it is grown indoors. Roots can rot in soil kept too moist.