**Euphorbia milii**

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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

### 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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1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-205, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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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

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
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.