Leea coccinea

Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

This vigorous, upright grower has distinctive, glossy, dark green, multi-divided leaves, producing a fernlike, lacy effect, similar to Fortune’s Mahonia (Fig. 1). Plants take on an upright form when young, growing into six to eight-foot-tall, rounded shrubs. New growth has a slight reddish cast. It makes an attractive foundation plant, and looks great in a shrub border in groups of three or more. A single plant looks very nice located in a very low-growing ground cover.

General Information

Scientific name: Leea coccinea
Pronunciation: LEE-uh kock-SIN-ee-uh
Common name(s): West Indian Holly, Leea
Family: Leeaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: border; mass planting; cut foliage/twigs; superior hedge; accent; small parking lot islands (<100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (>200 square feet in size)
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 4 to 8 feet
Spread: 4 to 5 feet

Plant habit: upright
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Figure 1. West Indian Holly.
Leaf type: bipinnately compound
Leaf margin: undulate
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: brachidodrome; 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: purple
Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: sand; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam; clay
Drought tolerance:
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

Growing well in bright light, out of direct sun, West Indian Holly survives fairly heavy shade but will grow slowly. Keep the soil uniformly moist. Plant on three to four-foot centers for a mass planting.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Plants are only occasionally bothered by chewing insects.

Figure 3. Foliage of West Indian Holly