



Arbutus unedo Strawberry-Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

Most often seen as a multi-stemmed, rounded, evergreen shrub or small tree reaching 8 to 15 feet in height with an equal spread, Strawberry-Tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height, and makes a very attractive specimen tree when pruned to a short, single trunk (Fig. 1). The trees take on a picturesque, somewhat twisted appearance over time, and exhibit dark, red/brown, flaking and shreddy bark accompanied by the lush, dark green, leathery, red-stemmed leaves. Growth rate is slow so trees over 20 feet tall are rare.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Arbutus unedo*

Pronunciation: ar-BEW-tus YOO-nee-doe

Common name(s): Strawberry-Tree

Family: *Ericaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; specimen; residential street tree

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

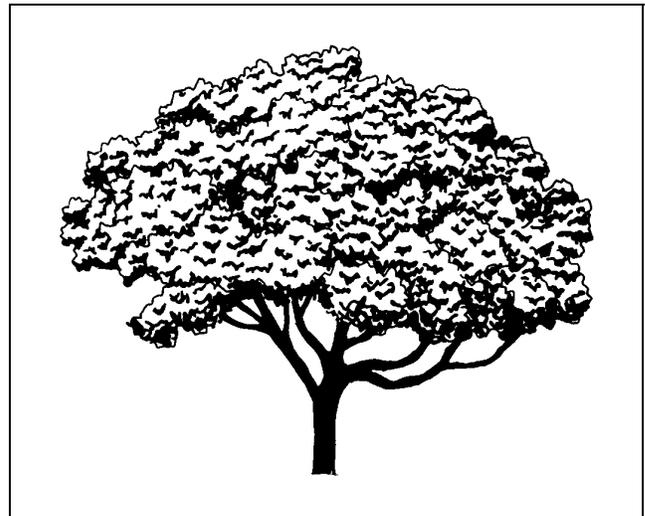


Figure 1. Mature Strawberry-Tree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 8 to 18 feet

Spread: 8 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: oblanceolate; obovate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen;
evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; white

Flower characteristics: fall flowering; showy; winter
flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: red; yellow

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; suited for human
consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant
litter; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and
will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian
clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or
trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy
trunk; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can
be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop
strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green; reddish

Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline;
well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

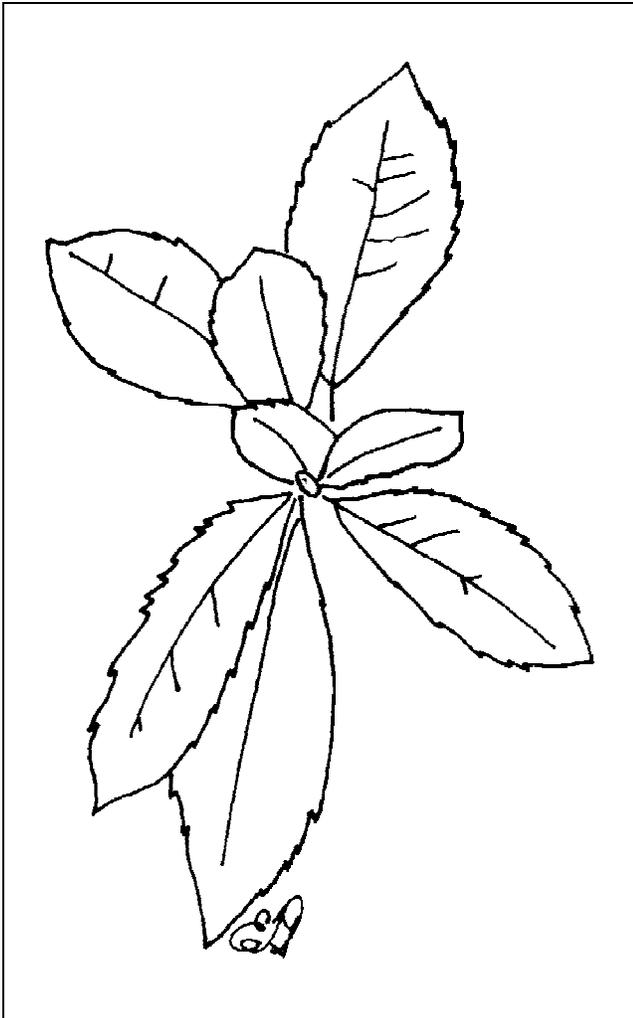


Figure 3. Foliage of Strawberry-Tree.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

In fall and winter, the small, white or pink blooms in two-inch-long panicles appear at the same time the previous-year's fruit are ripening. These unusual fruits have a rough, pebbled outer surface which ripen from yellow to red and persist on the tree throughout the winter, adding much to the tree's overall attractiveness.

Although the fruits look appealing, their bland taste seems to be popular only with birds.

Strawberry-Tree spreads quite wide as it grows taller and produces dense shade, making it ideal for use as a small shade, screen, hedge, or patio tree. The appearance of both fruits and flowers during the winter months also makes this plant very popular for specimen plantings. It is one of the most attractive small trees available for residential use but unfortunately is not normally available in the east. It should be grown and tried in the Deep South.

Strawberry-Tree will grow at a slow pace when planted in either full sun or partial shade on well-drained, acid soil. Plants are tolerant of wind and some drought once established and grow in well-drained clay.

The cultivar 'Compacta' is a smaller shrub, six to ten feet tall and wide; 'Elfin King' has a contorted, dwarf form, flowers and fruits year-round; 'Rubra' has deep pink flowers.

Propagation is by seed or layering.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.