

Psidium cattleianum: Strawberry Guava¹

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Introduction

This upright, multi-branched, evergreen shrub or small tree has many features which make it a popular landscape choice. Unfortunately, strawberry guava has escaped cultivation and has infested ditch banks and other wild areas in south Florida, and its use should be tempered. Capable of reaching 25 feet in height but often seen at 10 to 15 feet, the thick, smooth, dark green, four-inch-long, leathery leaves nicely complement the smooth, grey-brown to golden bark which attractively peels off in thin sheets. The single, white, one-inch-diameter flowers have many prominent stamens and look like powderpuffs in miniature. The blooms appear heaviest in April but can open sporadically throughout the year.

General Information

Scientific name: *Psidium cattleianum*

Pronunciation: SID-ee-um kat-lay-ee-AH-num

Common name(s): strawberry guava, cattley guava

Family: *Myrtaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Brazil

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: invasive and not recommended (South); caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (North, Central)



Figure 1. Full Form - *Psidium cattleianum*: strawberry guava
Credits: UF/IFAS

Uses: shade; deck or patio; specimen; espalier; fruit; container or planter; highway median

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet
Spread: 10 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: round, vase
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: obovate, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome



Figure 3. Leaf - *Psidium cattleianum*: strawberry guava
 Credits: UF/IFAS

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: 1 ½ to 4 inches
Leaf color: dark green on top, paler green underneath
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: showy; fragrant; emerges singly or in groups of 3 at leaf axis
Flowering: year-round

Fruit

Fruit shape: round or obovoid
Fruit length: 1 to 2 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy berry
Fruit color: purplish red
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem
Fruiting: year-round



Figure 4. Fruit - *Psidium cattleianum*: strawberry guava
 Credits: UF/IFAS

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Bark: gray to reddish brown, smooth, and peeling
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green, brown
Current year twig thickness: thin, medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Bark - *Psidium cattleianum*: strawberry guava
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The 1.5-inch-diameter, bright red, pear-shaped fruits ripen to a very dark red in July and are a popular treat - for people and wildlife. Birds, raccoons, and squirrels all love the delicious, sweet-tart, white flesh and will widely spread the small, grape-like seeds. The abundant, fallen fruits may be messy on hard surfaces such as walks and cars, and trees should probably not be planted along residential streets or over sidewalks or patios. It would make a good small boulevard or median street tree and accents an area with its well-shaped canopy and interesting trunk form. It combines well with other plants in a shrub border and provides both food and cover for wildlife.

Strawberry guava grows well in full sun or partial shade on a wide range of soils, including sand or clay, but fruit quality is improved on rich soils. Plants are drought-tolerant once established but benefit from a thick, organic mulch. Any necessary pruning should be done after fruiting. Pick the fruit for eating before the fruit fly larvae discover it.

Psidium littorale var. *littorale*, lemon guava, is slower-growing and has large yellow fruits with delightful, spicy flavor.

Propagation is by air-layering's or by seeds. Seeds germinate easily and rapidly. Seedling plants take seven or eight years to bear fruit.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Fruit fly larvae devour the fruit but do no harm to the tree.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.