Calliandra haematocephala
Powderpuff

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This large, multiple trunked, low-branching, evergreen shrub has silky leaflets which are glossy copper when new, turning to a dark metallic green (Fig. 1). The profuse, fragrant bloom is the main reason for its popularity, with big puffs, two to three inches across, of watermelon pink, deep red, or white silky stamens, produced during warm months.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Calliandra haematocephala
Pronunciation: kal-ee-AN-druh hee-mat-oh-SEFF-uh-luh
Common name(s): Powderpuff
Family: Leguminosae
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; hedge; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; trainable as a standard; specimen
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 12 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: open

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Flower

Flower color: pink; red
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; year round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green; gray
Current year twig thickness: medium; thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high

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: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: No entries found.
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
USE AND MANAGEMENT

With rapid growth in sandy soils and full sun, Powderpuff bush will respond favorably to regular watering while young but should require no special care once established except an occasional pruning to keep it within bounds. Powderpuff bush may be used as a tall (five to six-foot) flowering hedge and is often seen as a small, flowering specimen tree with the lower branches pruned off. Powderpuff can grow to about 15 feet tall when pruned into a small tree. The long, arching branches form an attractive canopy suitable for patio or container plantings. Pinching the new growth increases branch number and produces more flowers on a more compact plant.

Although plants are damaged by freezing temperatures, they grow back from the base in the spring in USDA hardiness zone 9.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

The cultivar ‘White’ has snow-white flowers.

PESTS

While usually pest-free, Powderpuff bush can be occasionally infested by mites, caterpillars, or other chewing insects.

DISEASES

No diseases are of major concern.