INTRODUCTION

This slender-stemmed, multi-trunked tropical evergreen tree or large shrub, a native of Cuba, reaches 15 feet in height with an equal spread, and has unusual seven-inch-long leaves varying in shape from oblong, fiddle-shaped, or even-lobed (Fig. 1). The one-inch-wide red flowers are produced year-round in beautiful clusters held upright above the foliage and helps make Fire-cracker an interesting specimen plant. The seed capsules which follow hold several smooth, speckled, and toxic seeds, a fact which must be considered when placing this plant in the landscape; it should be kept out of the reach of children.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Jatropha integerrima
Pronunciation: jat-ROE-fuh in-teh-GAIR-rih-muh
Common name(s): Peregrina, Fire-Cracker
Family: Euphorbiaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; 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; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 10 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
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: lobed
Leaf shape: oblong; obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red
Flower characteristics: showy; year round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
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; 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: brown
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
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate
USE AND MANAGEMENT

Jatropha makes a delightful red-flowered accent in a shrub border planted to attract attention to an area. It flowers nearly year round and so is quite popular as a patio tree or garden accent. Multiple trunks and stems originate near the ground forming a symmetrical, weeping clump of thinly-clothed branches. The tree can be staked and trained to grow with one trunk for two or three feet. This is a nice way to display the plant as an accent or specimen. Do not expect this small tree to provide shade, but it will attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Peregrina should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil. Full sun plants flower best. It is not salt-tolerant.

There is a pink-flowered form available at some nurseries.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally bothered by mites, scales, and superficial leaf miner.

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: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Figure 3. Foliage of Peregrina.