



Persea borbonia Redbay¹

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INTRODUCTION

This handsome North American native evergreen tree can reach 50 feet in height with a comparable spread but is often seen somewhat shorter and wider, particularly when grown in the open in an urban area (Fig. 1). The glossy, leathery, medium green, six-inch leaves emit a spicy fragrance when crushed and the inconspicuous, springtime flower clusters are followed by small, dark blue fruits which ripen in fall. These fruits are enjoyed by birds and squirrels and add to the tree's overall attractiveness. The trunk bears very showy, ridged, red-brown bark and frequently branches low to the ground forming a multi-stemmed habit similar to live oak, but it can be pruned to make a single, short central leader which would be most suitable for many urban plantings.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Persea borbonia*

Pronunciation: PER-see-uh bor-BOE-nee-uh

Common name(s): Redbay

Family: *Lauraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

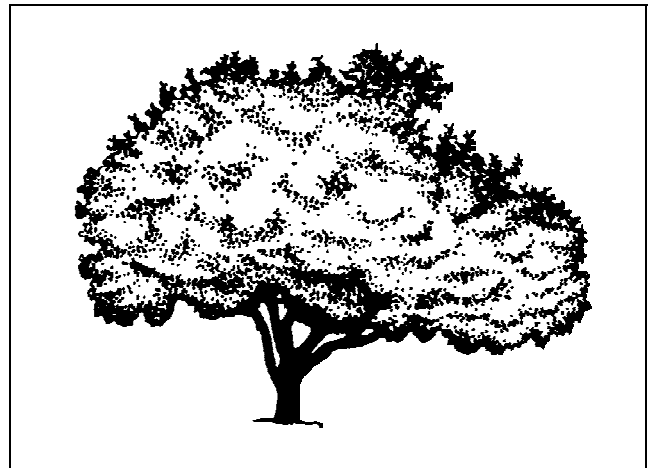


Figure 1. Mature Redbay.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 50 feet

Spread: 30 to 50 feet

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

Crown shape: round; spreading

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); lanceolate; oblong; ovate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen; fragrant

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: blue

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; 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; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Culture

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

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: good

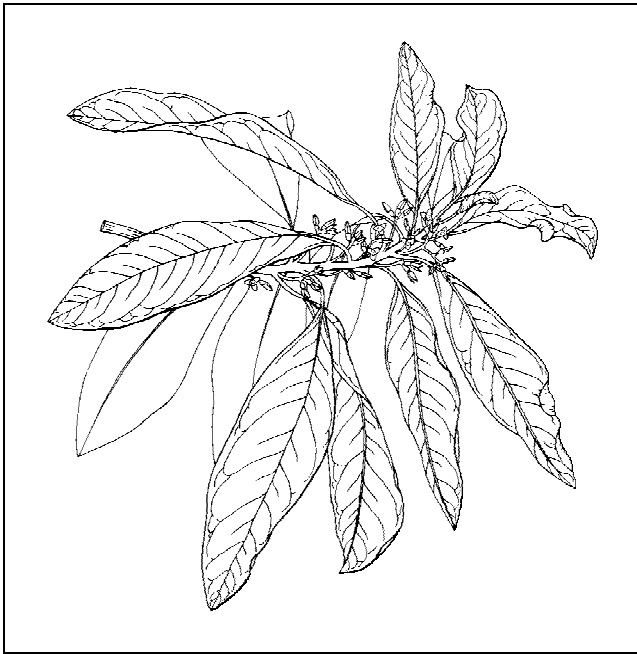


Figure 3. Foliage of Redbay.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

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

Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Thriving on little care in full sun or partial shade, Redbay can tolerate a wide range of soils, from hot and dry to wet and swampy. Redbay is a rugged and adaptable plant suitable to many landscape applications. Unfortunately, the wood is reportedly brittle and subject to wind damage. Pruning to keep lateral branches less than half the diameter of the trunk will increase the tree's longevity and help prevent branches from separating from the trunk. The densely-foliated, spreading branches create a lush, billowy, rounded canopy making Redbay a wonderful shade tree. It can make a nice street tree planted on 20 to 25-foot centers but be sure to prune it properly as mentioned above. Plant with caution where cars will park or near sidewalks since birds love the fruit and often visit the tree, leaving their droppings on cars. The fruit can also be messy on cars and walks. Its ease of growth and neat, dense crown habit also make Redbay ideal for the low-maintenance and naturalized

landscape. The dark brown, furrowed bark is particularly attractive on older specimens.

Propagation is by seed which germinate readily after several months in the ground.

Pests and Diseases

Redbay is occasionally bothered by twig dieback. This can be caused by a boring insect which bores inside a small twig causing the leaves on the end of the twig to turn brown and hang on the tree. This can be bothersome to a nursery operator, but usually only causes cosmetic damage to landscape trees. Insect-caused galls can distort and disfigure the leaves but do not significantly harm the tree. Scale insects occasionally infest the twigs or leaves, followed by sooty mold.