

# *Malpighia glabra* Barbados Cherry, Wild Crapemyrtle<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Barbados cherry develops into a thick, rounded canopy of fairly delicate foliage. Small pink flowers appear periodically from April to October and are followed about one month later by bright red, tart-tasting, 1 inch fruits which are extremely high in vitamin C. It is commonly available in nurseries throughout south Florida.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Malpighia glabra*: Barbados Cherry, Wild Crapemyrtle  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf and Fruit - *Malpighia glabra*: Barbados Cherry, Wild Crapemyrtle  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Bark - *Malpighia glabra*: Barbados Cherry, Wild Crapemyrtle  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

1. This document is FPS-390, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised October 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus; Ryan W. Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture; and Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design; Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Malpighia glabra*

**Pronunciation:** mal-PIG-ee-uh GLAY-bruh

**Common name(s):** Barbados cherry, wild crapemyrtle

**Family:** *Malpighiaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9B through 11 (Figure 4)

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** specimen; container or above-ground planter; border; hedge; near a deck or patio; screen

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



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 10 to 12 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Plant habit:** round

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** lanceolate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** 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

**Flower characteristic:** summer flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** 0.5 to 1 inch

**Fruit cover:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristic:** suited for human consumption; persists on the plant; attracts birds

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

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

## Use and Management

This open, upright, evergreen shrub grows at a slow pace to 12 feet tall and wide, making it well-suited as a foundation planting for larger buildings or used in the rear of the shrubbery border. Trained to numerous multi-trunks, it can be used as a small accent tree just as Japanese ligustrum is used. The multi-trunks rise sinuously up through the crown creating a sculptured specimen well-suited for placing near a patio, deck or entry way to attract attention. It looks great lighted at night from below the tree.

Growing in full sun or partial shade, Barbados cherry needs fertile, nematode-free soil and is not salt-tolerant.

Plant 5 to 6 feet apart for a mass planting or to develop a tall, thick screen.

Propagation is by layering or cuttings.

## Pests and Diseases

Pests include nematodes, whiteflies, scale, and plant bugs, which will attack and deform the fruit.