

Arbutus unedo: Strawberry-Tree¹

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Introduction

Most often seen as a multi-stemmed, rounded, evergreen shrub or small tree reaching 8 to 15 feet in height with an equal spread, Strawberry-Tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height, and makes a very attractive specimen tree when pruned to a short, single trunk. The trees take on a picturesque, somewhat twisted appearance over time, and exhibit dark, red/brown, flaking and shreddy bark accompanied by the lush, dark green, leathery, red-stemmed leaves. Growth rate is slow so trees over 20 feet tall are rare.

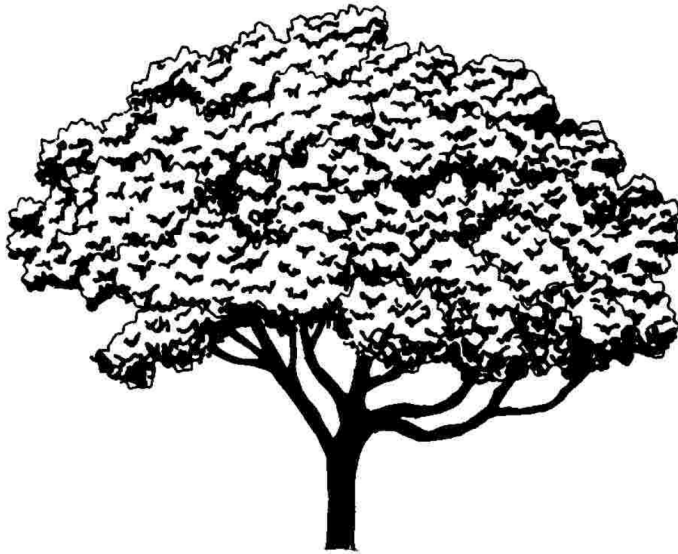


Figure 1. Mature *Arbutus unedo*: Strawberry-Tree

General Information

Scientific name: *Arbutus unedo*

Pronunciation: ar-BEW-tus YOO-nee-doe

Common name(s): Strawberry-Tree

Family: *Ericaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; specimen; screen; hedge; deck or patio; container or planter; highway median

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

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Description

Height: 8 to 18 feet

Spread: 8 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: obovate, oblanceolate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray, pink

Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: red, yellow

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green, reddish

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: yes

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Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

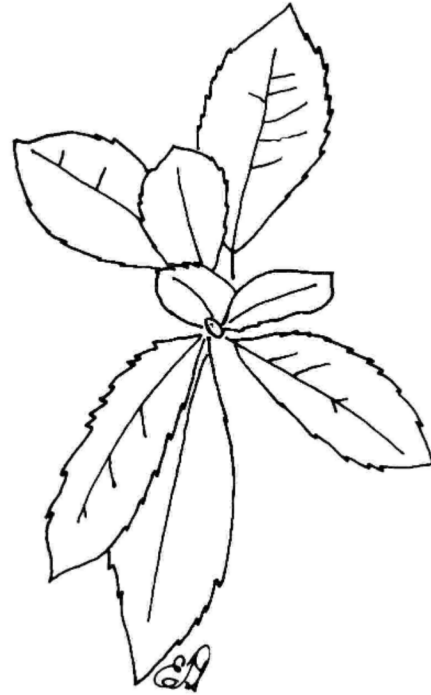


Figure 3. Foliage

Use and Management

In fall and winter, the small, white or pink blooms in two-inch-long panicles appear at the same time the previous-year's fruit are ripening. These unusual fruits have a rough, pebbled outer surface which ripen from yellow to red and persist on the tree throughout the winter, adding much to the tree's overall attractiveness. Although the fruits look appealing, their bland taste seems to be popular only with birds.

Strawberry-Tree spreads quite wide as it grows taller and produces dense shade, making it ideal for use as a small shade, screen, hedge, or patio tree. The appearance of both fruits and flowers during the winter months also makes this plant very popular for specimen plantings. It is one of the most attractive small trees available for residential use but unfortunately is not normally available in the east. It should be grown and tried in the Deep South.

Strawberry-Tree will grow at a slow pace when planted in either full sun or partial shade on well-drained, acid

soil. Plants are tolerant of wind and some drought once established and grow in well-drained clay.

The cultivar 'Compacta' is a smaller shrub, six to ten feet tall and wide; 'Elfin King' has a contorted, dwarf form, flowers and fruits year-round; 'Rubra' has deep pink flowers.

Propagation is by seed or layering.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.