



Brazilian Pepper-tree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*)

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Florida's natural ecosystems are being degraded by an invasion of non-native plants. This invasion is partially responsible for the declining numbers and quality of native biotic communities throughout Florida.

Brazilian pepper-tree is one of the most aggressive of these non-native invaders. Where once there were ecologically productive mangrove communities along the gulf coast of Hernando County, now there are pure stands of Brazilian pepper-trees. Scrub and pine flatwood communities are also being affected by this invasion. Nearly all terrestrial ecosystems in central and southern Florida are being encroached upon by the Brazilian pepper-tree.

Native to Argentina and Brazil, the tree is sensitive to cold temperatures, making it more common in South Florida and protected coastal areas. Seedlings are flood-tolerant, but rapid change of water level up or down causes some mortality.

Brazilian pepper-tree is a shrub or small tree to 10 m (33 ft) tall with a short trunk usually hidden in a dense head of contorted, intertwining branches. The leaves have a reddish, sometimes winged midrib, and smell of turpentine when crushed. The plants have separate male or female flowers and each sex occurs in clusters on separate plants. The fruits are in clusters, glossy, green and juicy at first, becoming bright red on ripening, and 6 mm (2.4 in) wide. The red skin dries to become a papery shell surrounding the seed. Birds and mammals are the chief means of seed dispersal. Seedlings have a high rate of survival; reproduction can occur three years after germination and some trees can live for about 35 years.

The best time to cut Brazilian pepper-trees is when they are not fruiting because seeds contained in the fruits have the capability of producing new trees. Homeowners should always take care to properly bag and dispose of any tree parts when removing. Herbicides are available that aid in the control of Brazilian pepper-trees. Only those herbicides that are recommended for Brazilian pepper-tree control should be used. For more information on chemical control please contact the UF/IFAS Extension Hernando County office.

Adapted from UF/IFAS Extension EDIS Document #SS-AGR-17 written by Ken Gioeli and Ken Langeland. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

UF/IFAS Extension Hernando County Fact Sheet 2015-02



Figure 1. New growth on Brazilian pepper. (Amy Ferriter, State of Idaho, Bugwood.org)



Figure 2. Close-up of mature leaf. (Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)



Figure 3. Cluster of flowers. (Amy Ferriter, State of Idaho, Bugwood.org)



Figure 4. Young Brazilian pepper berries. (Amy Ferriter, State of Idaho, Bugwood.org)



Figure 5. Mature fruit of Brazilian pepper. (Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, Bugwood.org)



Figure 6. Brazilian pepper trees with fruit. (James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org)