

BRAZILIAN PEPPERTREE

SCHINUS TEREBINTHIFOLIA

HISTORY

The Brazilian Peppertree is native to South American countries such as Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. It was introduced into the United States as an ornamental plant around the mid to late 1800's. By the 1950's this plant spread to natural areas and it is now considered the dominant plant in many parts of Florida.

The Brazilian Peppertree was also introduced to The Bahamas as an ornamental plant. Brazilian Peppertrees are fast-growing very tolerant plants. Therefore, this plant has since spread throughout the country and has replaced numerous native plants, which makes it an invasive plant.

DESCRIPTION

The Brazilian Peppertree is a tall shrub that can grow up to 40ft. tall and can have multiple trunks. The leaflets are usually a deep, glossy, green color with reddish veins, and they grow opposite from each other with one leaflet at the tip. The leaflets can have a serrated or smooth edge and are aromatic, meaning that they produce a distinctive smell when crushed. This smell is spicy in nature lending the plants its name. The clustered flowers are small and ivory white and their main attraction is their bright red berries.



COMMON NAMES

Peruvian peppertree, California peppertree, mastic-tree, American pepper, false pepper,

HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION

Brazilian pepper trees are sensitive to cold temperatures, so they grow mostly in tropical to subtropical environments. These plants can grow in areas recently cleared for development, in the Pine Forests, Mangrove, and other Coastal areas. Its ability to grow in so many ecosystems has made it a pest because they replace so many native floras. Brazilian Pepper can now be found in Florida, The Bahamas throughout the West Indies, Hawaii, California, and throughout the Northern and Southern countries in Africa.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

This species is fast-growing and a successful invader because of how effectively it disperses seeds. The branches of this plant also grow in tangled forms, which make them hard to destroy by humans, insects, and even storms. This invasive tree grows densely and allows very little light into native coppice forests, which threatens their existence. These adaptations allow the Brazilian Peppertree to out-compete the native trees and destroy food sources for native animal species such as birds. The bright red berries are very attractive to birds, which consume them and help to disperse the seeds, leading to further spread.



REPRODUCTION

The fruits of the Brazilian Peppertree usually mature in December. The seedlings have a high survival rate and can be found all year round. These seeds are mainly dispersed by birds who eat the narcotic berries only to spit them out spreading the seeds and saliva which acts as a fertilizer. The roots can also reproduce asexually by sending up shoots.



INTERESTING FACT

The Brazilian Pepper belongs to the same family as the Poisonwood. All parts of the plant contain irritating compounds, which cause allergic skin reactions. When the berries are ingested in large amounts, they can cause complications such as inflammation, vomiting and diarrhea, hemorrhoids, shortness of breath, and violent headaches. However, the plant has also been used in the past for medicinal purposes.

In The Bahamas, Brazilian Peppertree is also called the Christmas Holly. The Brazilian Peppertree produces a lot of nectar when it blossoms and therefore has been favored by Beekeepers. However, this small benefit is far outweighed by the negative aspects of this plant.

