

Fiddlewood

Citharexylum caudatum L.

Verbena family (Verbenaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

This shrub or small tree introduced as an ornamental has become naturalized locally. It has paired elliptical leaves and narrow clusters of small slightly fragrant white flowers, and showy shiny pear-shaped or elliptical fruits that turn from green to orange brown or black.

Evergreen shrub or small tree to 50 ft (15 m) high, with trunk 1 ft (0.3 m) in diameter, angled, slightly enlarged at base, and irregular, and with spreading crown. Bark gray, smoothish, becoming finely fissured. Inner bark light brown and whitish streaked, bitter. Twigs long and narrow, light gray brown, hairless, with enlarged nodes and raised leaf-scars.

Leaves opposite, hairless, on leafstalks of $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (1–2 cm). Blades elliptical, 2–5 inches (5–13 cm) long and $\frac{3}{4}$ – $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches (2–6 cm) wide, blunt to short-pointed at apex and short-pointed at base, with edges sometimes slightly turned under, slightly thickened, with few side veins, slightly shiny green above, and beneath dull and paler with many tiny dots visible under a lens. Leafstalks and midveins often orange red.

Flower clusters (racemes) $1\frac{1}{2}$ –6 inches (4–15 cm) long, terminal and lateral, narrow and unbranched. Flowers many on short stalks of $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm), about $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long and broad. Calyx bell-shaped, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) long and broad, minutely five-toothed; the white finely hairy corolla with tube nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) long and five spreading slightly unequal rounded corolla lobes $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) long; 4 small stamens inserted in corolla tube; and greenish pistil $\frac{3}{16}$ inch (5 mm) long with two-celled ovary, slender style, and slightly two-lobed stigma.

Fruits (drupes) in drooping clusters, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (13 mm) long, slightly two-lobed, fleshy, with calyx remaining at base, containing two elliptical shiny brown nutlets $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (10 mm) long, each single-seeded.

The light brown hard wood is used elsewhere for posts, not for musical instruments, as reported. This species is a honey plant.

An introduced ornamental in Hawaii, it is a common street tree in Honolulu. When young, highly susceptible to wind damage. Naturalized locally, for example, in wet forests at 2000 ft (610 m) altitude on Oahu.

Range

Native of West Indies from Bahamas to Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Dominica. Also from Yucatan, Mexico, and Central America to Colombia. Planted in southern Florida

Other common names

juniper-berry; pendula de sierra (Puerto Rico)

This species is reported to be one of the many hosts of the black twig-borer, a major insect pest.

The generic name *Citharexylum* is Greek for fiddlewood. The English name fiddlewood and similar ones in French and Spanish for related species apparently were taken from the scientific name without regard to actual use of the wood.



Fiddlewood

Citharexylum caudatum L.

Fruiting twig, flowers (upper right), 1 X.