**Myrtus communis** L.  
*Myrtus boetica, Myrtus buxiifolia, Myrtus italic, Myrtus latifolia, Myrtus minima*

**Other Common Names:** Bride’s Myrtle, Roman Myrtle, Sweet Myrtle, Sweet Roman Myrtle, True Myrtle, True Roman Myrtle.

**Family:** Myrtaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** Useful in USDA zones 9(8b) to 11.

**Foliage:** Evergreen; opposite; simple; ovate to lanceolate; 10 to 20 long; fine textured; acute to acuminate tips; rounded to cuneate bases; margins are entire; dark lustrous green; stiff; aromatic if crushed; pinnately veined with the main vein paler and impressed above and raised beneath; petiole ¼ or shorter and yellow-green, green, or flushed red in color.

**Flower:** Perfect; small, ½ to ¾ (1) across; white to pinkish white; numerous stamens are present; solitary or in small axillary clusters in late spring to early summer; mildly interesting; fragrant.

**Fruit:** Fruits are slightly elongate globose berries about ½ in diameter and are generally reminiscent of blueberries in shape and color; green turning reddish or pinkish and then eventually blue-black when ripe in late summer to fall.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — twigs are fine textured; initially green in color, rapidly turning orange-brown and then gray-brown; Buds — foliose; very tiny, 1/16 long or less; tan-brown in color; Bark — handsome with age; the bark is smooth and gray-brown in color, eventually developing a brown pealing aspect showing the lighter tan inner bark.

**Habit:** The species type develops an irregular upright oval form, eventually becoming a small tree 12 to 15 tall in old age; plants are often shorn to maintain a lower profile, say under 5 or 6; overall plants are fine textured and are reminiscent of the Common Boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*) in form.

**Cultural Requirements:** Locate plants in full sun to light shade; heat, drought, and salt tolerant; avoid exposure to winds to reduce winter injury; plants are intolerant of poorly drained soils and high humidity, so they are often planted in raised beds or containers; growth is moderate to fairly slow, particularly on the compact cultivars.

**Pathological Problems:** Myrtle is prone to infestation by scale insects and subsequently sooty mold may develop; root rots occur on wet soils; thrips and spider mites can attach in hot weather.

**Ornamental Assets:** Handsome fine textured foliage and excellent adaptability to shearing are key assets; flowering is noticeable.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Limited cold tolerance, intolerance to poor drainage, and susceptibility to scale insects are the primary limitations.

**Landscape Utilization:** Formal sheared hedges are the principle use for the species; old specimens can be limbed up into small trees; *Myrtus communis* is excellent for hedges, screens, patio planters and pots, or for providing a dark green background for perennial or annual color plantings; Myrtle is a classic for Mediterranean gardens and historic, period, scent or educational gardens; compact forms are a favorite for knot garden borders; Myrtle is a favorite of coastal landscapers and works as a bonsai.

**Other Comments:** *Myrtus communis* is the classic myrtle of antiquity; the genus name is the Greek name for *M. communis*; the specific epithet means common or typical.

**Native Habitat:** Thought to originate from Iran and Afghanistan, *M. communis* has been cultivated throughout the Mediterranean region since the beginning of recorded history.

**Related Taxa:** Several dwarf selections have been made for more compact growth habits; ‘Compacta’ (*Myrtus communis* var. *compacta*, Dwarf Myrtle, Dwarf Roman Myrtle) is a slow growing dwarf selection maturing at about 2 tall; ‘Microphylla’ (*Myrtus communis* var. *microphylla*, Narrow-leaf
Myrtle) is also slow growing and a dwarf cultivar with narrow compact foliage, but it matures a bit larger than ‘Compacta’; ‘Boetica’ (*Myrtus boetica*, Twisted Myrtle) is a selection used for its interesting trunk and branching patterns and is best limbed up as a small tree or planted in large containers as a sort of big bonsai specimen.

**References:** Boyle, 1960; DeWerth. 1967; Dirr, 2002; Friend, 1942; Hume, 1929; Jones and Sacamano, 2000; Loeb and Carpenter, 1992; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Welch and Grant, 1995.

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