

Elaeocarpus decipiens W.B.Hemsley ex F.B. Forbes & W.B. Hemsley

Japanese Blueberry Tree

Other Common Names: Blueberry Tree.

Family: Elaeocarpaceae.

Cold Hardiness: Grown in USDA zones 9(8b) to 11 landscapes.

Foliage: Evergreen; alternate; simple; narrowly elliptic to obovate; 30to 50long by ¾0to 1½0wide; tips acute; margins shallowly scalloped or crenate; bases cuneate; veins pinnate; main and sometimes the primary lateral veins are a lighter yellow green on the upper surface of the blade than the background color; blades leathery in texture, dark lustrous green above and duller lighter green beneath; older leaves turning yellow-orange to bright red as they senesce; leaves tending to point forward on the stems; petioles ½0to 10long, stout; green.

Flower: Small fragrant white to greenish white five-petaled inverted urn-shaped flowers occur in spring in short axillary racemes; flowers are valvate in bud; the flowers tend to be hidden within the foliage, but are noticeably fragrant *en masse*.

Fruit: Small blue-black olive-like drupe; sometimes borne in quantity and are noticeable if not particularly showy; fruits of some related species in the genus can be much showier.

Stem / Bark: Stems — stiff; initially slightly angled, becoming rounded in cross-section at maturity; bright green or flushed red, remaining bright green for a while before becoming mottled green and brown, then eventually brown; glabrous; white to light tan lenticels form as the first season's growth matures, lenticels become tan to brown and strongly raised on second and older year's twigs and stems; leaf scars are shallowly crescent-shaped; Buds — small, 1/16 0long or less; ovoid; green; Bark — brown; with numerous lenticels.

Habit: In its native range this species can reach 40Nto 60Nin height with a 20Nto 40Nspread; ultimate sizes are not known for our region and dwarf cultivars such as 'MonProud' are the most widely planted types in thus far in our region; the few older species type specimens that I have seen in our region, have developed a much more open canopy as they aged than is usually seen with the tightly growing shrubby juvenile plants present in many current landscapes.

Cultural Requirements: Although more tolerant of neutral to slightly alkaline soils than many traditional broadleaved evergreens such as Rhododendrons and Azaleas, *Elaeocarpus decipiens* will tend to become chlorotic on high pH soils; a rich well drained soil is best with a steady supply of moisture; plants are prone to tip damage in USDA zone 8, particularly when late spring frosts are common; despite a number of producers' claims of cold tolerance in USDA zone 8, this should be viewed skeptically until plants have been grown more extensively and over a longer period of time in our region.

Pathological Problems: None appear to be significant at present.

Ornamental Assets: The dark lustrous evergreen mature foliage and bronze new leaves are the primary assets; the fragrant flowers and blue-black fruit are minor pluses.

Limitations & Liabilities: Limited cold tolerance, an open growth form in old age, and a propensity to become chlorotic on high pH soils are the primary limitations; fruits can be messy on walkways.

Landscape Utilization: The dwarf forms or the species type when young are suitable for use as foundation plants for large structures, but remember the species type has the potential to overgrow such sites; probably the greatest potential lies with utilizing specimens of this species as large hedges,

screens for shielding views, or evergreen backdrops for highlighting plants with contrasting flower or fruit displays.

Other Comments: This species holds considerable promise for use as a general purpose broadleaved evergreen tree in the southern portions of our region where there are precious few substitutes; the genus name is derived from the Greek words for olive and fruit; the specific epithet means deceptive.

Native Habitat: Japan.

Related Taxa: The cultivar 'MonProud', the Dwarf Japanese Blueberry Tree, marketed under the trademark name Little Emperor™ is perhaps the most common taxon in the trade; it is a smaller more compact version of the species that is suppose to stay 6Nto 8N(10N) tall; there are several important subtropical and tropical ornamental and forest trees in this genus (see Barwick, 2004), most are valued for their handsome foliage, flowers and blue fruit; however, perhaps we should watch this group of plants with a cautious eye as several species have become invasive in tropical climates.

References: Barwick, 2004.

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