

Brazilian Peppertree SCTE

Schinus terebinthifolius Raddi

Synonyms: Brazilian pepper, Florida holly, Christmas berry

From: Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

Family: Anacardiaceae

Plant. Evergreen shrub or small tree to 40 feet (12 m) in height often in dense infestations with many short trunks or arching stems of contorted branches. Drooping, odd-pinnately compound leaves that smell of turpentine when crushed. Many multi-branched clusters of small, whitish flowers in summer and fall that yield clusters of spherical, red,pepper-smelling fruit in winter on female plants.

Caution: All parts of the plant can cause skin rash or airways irritation in sensitive people.

Stem. Twigs and root sprouts yellow-green with V-shaped leaf scars, becoming smooth gray-brownish branches that become entangled and tend to droop. Older bark with braided grayish ridges and reddish brown fissures.

Leaves. Evergreen and thick, alternate, 3 to 12 inches (8 to 30 cm) long having reddish, sometimes winged midribs, odd pinnately compound with 3 to 13 sessile, ovate to elliptic leaflets, finely toothed, each 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) long, shiny and green above with light-green midveins and lateral veins and blade paler beneath. Often drooping and emit an aroma of pepper or turpentine when crushed.

Flowers. September to November and other times. Axillary and terminal, multi-branched clusters on new growth of many tiny flowers with 5 white petals and yellow centers Male and female flowers on separate plants.

Fruit and seeds. September to August. Berry-like, spherical drupes, 0.2 to 0.3 inches (6 to 8 mm) wide, in profuse clusters, light green ripening quickly to bright red and then dark red, fleshy and juicy becoming papery, containing one dark brown 0.1-inch (0.3 mm) long seed.

Ecology. Forms dense thickets, spreading by many root sprouts that yield entangled stems and branches with abundant foliage that contains allelopathic chemicals to exclude other plants and animals. Tolerant to a wide variety of growing conditions, but grows best in moist soils. Persists in shade with rapid growth in full sun. Producing seed as early as 3 years. Abundant seed are spread by birds with seedlings able to establish in shade. Presently limited by cold, but spreading northward with warming trends.

Resembles the nonnative peppertree (*Schinus molle* L.), escaped in FL, TX, and CA, but its 19 to 40 leaflets are narrowly lance-shaped. **Also might resemble** another rash causing shrub, poison sumac [*Toxicodendron vernix* (L.) Kuntze] that frequents similar wet habitats and has jutting, odd pinnately compound leaves with sharp-tipped leaflets and reddish petioles and stalks.

History and use. Native to South America and introduced in the 1840's to Florida as an ornamental and widely sold and planted until recently.