

Jamaica Caper, *Quadrella jamaicensis*

Introduction

Jamaica Caper is a versatile and attractive plant for use in the coastal landscapes of Monroe County. Native throughout the Keys and the Southeast and Southwest coasts of Florida, its beautiful shiny leaves and abundant, showy flowers make it an excellent landscape plant. Though it is in the Caper family (Capparaceae), Jamaica Caper seeds are not edible. There is also a closely related species, Limber Caper (*Capparis flexuosa*) with a more vine-like growth habit that is also native to the Florida Keys.

General Information

Origin: Coastal hammocks of Southern Florida, including Monroe County, and tropical America.

U.S.D.A. Zone: 9B-11



Kitty Somerville

Michelle Mularz

Description

Low maintenance, large, woody shrub that can be maintained as a small tree. It is suitable for use in container gardening and can be kept on patios or porches that receive adequate sunlight. Plants can be slow to establish in the landscape, with little growth during this period.

Typical Dimensions: 6' to 15' in height with a canopy spread ranging from 4' to 12'; taller than broad.

Leaf Characteristics: Simple, alternate leaves; blades oblong to elliptic with the leaf tip notched or rounded and smooth margins; curved slightly upward. Leaves are somewhat leathery, dark green, with a shiny upper surface and covered in dense, brownish scales on the lower surface. Leaves of seedlings are

significantly different from mature plants and will persist for the first year or two of growth.



Michelle Mularz

Flowers: Brush-like, fragrant flowers characterized by four small, white petals at the base with masses of long stamens that are 1" to 2" in length. Flowers open white, turning to pink/purple. Typical flowering time is from April to June. Plants in the Lower Keys bloom slightly earlier. Flowers open in the evening and are pollinated by night-flying moths attracted to the fragrance, which is more pronounced at night. Honey bees also frequent the flowers.

Fruit/Seed: A tannish seed pod up to 12" long, narrow between seed cavities; when ripe opens to reveal a red/orange interior with bean-like brown seeds surrounded by a red aril. The pistil (centrally located female reproductive part) stays as the flower wilts and then develops the fruit. Seeds take 2 to 4 months to mature, which generally occur in Monroe County from July through September.



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Cultural Requirements

Light Requirements: Full sun to partial shade, with seeds developing slower in shaded plants. Can be used as an understory shrub.

Salt Tolerance: High tolerance to salt spray. Moderate salt tolerance from short-term flooding. Local reports varied on survivability due to storm surge during and after Hurricane Irma.

Drought Tolerance: High. Supplemental watering is only needed during establishment or periods of drought.

Wind Tolerance: High

Soil Requirements: Will grow in a wide range of soil types but prefers well-drained soil.

Nutritional Requirements: Low to medium. Well adapted to the alkaline soils of the Florida Keys. Would benefit from the addition of organic matter.

Potential Pests: During the summer months, *Dichogama amabilis* caterpillars can cause some defoliation, but the damage is usually minimal.

Propagation: Seeds or seedlings. From seed, allow seeds to dry for 2 days. Sow seeds in a light soil medium. Keep the soil moist, but not damp, to prevent fungal problems. Nursery germination rate is reported to be greater than 50 percent. Typical germination time is one month.

Wildlife: Provides significant food and cover for wildlife including many birds, which eat the fruit. It is an excellent mid-canopy option for wildlife gardens.

Comments: Jamaica Caper was long known as *Capparis cynophallophora* (now *Quadrella cynophallophora*), but that name was apparently misapplied to our Florida species.

Q. cynophallophora is restricted to the Bahamas and Hispaniola.

The American Forests organization maintains a registry to recognize the largest known tree of each species in the United States. The National Champion Jamaica Caper is located within Everglades National Park in Key Largo and is 30' in height with a crown spread of 33'.



Kitty Somerville

Written by

Michelle Leonard-Mularz, Environmental Horticulture Agent, UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension, and Master Gardener volunteers Hazel Hans, Kitty Somerville, Sue Sullivan, and Christa Varacalli. 1100 Simonton St, Key West, FL 33040. Original publication date June 2019.

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