A BACKYARD NOTEBOOK
A Brief Summary of Personal Experimentation with Natives as Backyard Plants
Third in a Series
by Doris Rosebraugh

FLORIDA FIDDLEWOOD

*Citharexylum fruticosum* L.

West and Arnold describe fiddlewood as 25 feet high, trunks six inches in diameter, with crowns narrow, irregular, and composed of slender, upright, recurved branches. The trunks are creamy beige and smooth. Their shining green leaves are touched with orange in the petioles and glisten in the sun. When it is bending over with long clusters of orange to black berries it is lovely. The birds think so, too.

However, it can’t stand gusty winds, especially our gale-force rain storms. One of mine in a sheltered border split down the middle. Others have lost large portions of branches, especially when loaded with fruit. For this reason, I am recommending them as a barrier-screen material, particularly for bird lovers. Bul-buls always know when the berries are ripe, and show up with the mockingbirds, orioles, catbirds, etc., depending on the time of year. Warblers come for the flowers and resulting insects. Fiddlewood produces more than one crop per season.

The Ganns have had success using fiddlewood as a tall wind screen along one side of their nursery, permitting it to attain 12 to 15 feet of growth before cutting back. I intend to follow the same program. My leros planted in 1979 have touched the telephone wires once and have been topped. They are reaching again and are due for reshaping. The one so badly damaged last year was cut nearly to the ground and resprouted slowly. Birds eating the tender new growth didn’t help. It is trying again, and I believe it is the lack of full sun on the new foliage that is slowing its recovery. With spring weather and fertilizer it should fill out.

Fiddlewood is certainly attractive and desirable in the native landscape, but free-standing specimens are too subject to the elements. Use this one for filling, screening, and feeding the birds.