

Brazilian Pepper-tree, *Schinus terebinthifolius*¹

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Classification

Common Name: Brazilian Pepper-tree

Scientific Name: *Schinus terebinthifolius*

Family: Raddi Anacardiaceae, Sumac Family

Seedling

The cotyledons are simple with both the apex and the base having an obtuse outline (Figure 1). The margin is generally curved inward on one side. The first true leaves are simple with a toothed margin. The later leaves are compound.

Mature Plant

Brazilian Pepper-tree is a shrub or small tree up to 10 m tall with a short trunk usually hidden in a dense head of contorted, intertwining branches (Figure 2). The leaves have a reddish, sometimes winged midrib, and have 3-13 sessile, oblong or elliptic, finely toothed leaflets, 2.5-5 cm long. The plants have male and female flowers. Each sex occurs on a separate plant with flowering occurring at any season (mostly September through October). The



Figure 1. Seedling, Brazilian Pepper-tree, *Schinus terebinthifolius*

flower clusters are 5-7 cm long. The male and female flowers are similar. Both are white (0.2 mm in diameter) and are made up of five parts with 10 stamens in 2 rows of 5. The flowers also have a lobed disc within the stamens. The fruits are in clusters which are glossy, green and juicy at first, becoming bright red on ripening. The red skin dries to become a

1. This document is an excerpt from Weeds in Florida, SP 37, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: May 1991. Revised: March 2006. Please visit the EDIS Website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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papery shell surrounding the seed. The seed is dark brown and 0.3 mm in diameter.



Figure 2. Mature plant, Brazilian Pepper-tree, *Schinus terebinthifolius*

History

This species is a native of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. It is thought to have been introduced into Florida by 1842-1849 as a cultivated ornamental plant. *Schinus* is the Greek word for mastic-tree, a plant with resinous sap, which this genus resembles. The species name *terebinthifolius* is a combination of the genus name *Terebinthus* and the Latin name *folia*, leaf. It refers to the leaves of this plant which resemble those of species in the genus *Terebinthus*.

Habitat

Schinus is widely distributed in Florida and is sensitive to cold temperatures so it is limited to protected areas in central Florida. It is an aggressive invader of disturbed habitats. Brazilian Pepper-tree successfully colonizes several native plant communities: hammocks, pinelands and mangrove forests.

Biology

Seedlings are flood tolerant but rapid change of water level up or down causes some mortality. About 20% of seedlings exposed to fire resprout. Flowering occurs from September through November. Male flowers last only 1 day. Female flowers last up to 6

days and are insect pollinated. Fruits are usually mature by December. Birds and mammals are the chief means of dispersal. Viability is 30-60% which can last up to 2 months with 0.05% at 5 months. Germination is enhanced by scarification with a dilute acid. The dilute acid may have the same effect as the acids found in an animal's digestive tract. Many native species have a lower percentage of germination than *Schinus*. The higher germination percentage combined with the animal dispersing agents may explain its colonization in native plant communities.

Seedlings have a high rate of survival and some can be found all year. Any break in the canopy can be utilized. Reproduction can occur 3 years after germination. Some trees can live for 35 years.

Additional Information

For additional information, including *Schinus* control, refer to UF/IFAS EDIS publication SS-AGR-17 Brazilian Pepper-tree Control (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AA219>).