

# Spanish stopper

(*Eugenia foetida*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Spanish stopper is an evergreen shrub or small tree native to coastal hardwood hammocks and thickets in Central and South Florida. Its semi-showy flowers bloom year-round, with peak blooming in spring and summer, attracting many types of pollinators. Its dense foliage provides cover and its abundant fruit provides food for birds and other small animals.

Spanish stopper's flowers are white and four-petaled with many obvious stamens, giving the flower a frilly appearance. They are born in axillary clusters. Leaves are simple, leathery and ovate with reddish petioles. They are dark green with yellowish undersides. Margins are entire and appear yellow. Leaf arrangement is opposite. Crown is relatively narrow. Bark is smooth and brownish-gray; it may be scaly in older specimens. Fruits are small (about ¼-inch in diameter), round fleshy berries that are reddish in color, turning purplish-black when mature.



Photo by Bob Peterson

They are dark green with yellowish undersides. Margins are entire and appear yellow. Leaf arrangement is opposite. Crown is relatively narrow. Bark is smooth and brownish-gray; it may be scaly in older specimens. Fruits are small (about ¼-inch in diameter), round fleshy berries that are reddish in color, turning purplish-black when mature.

The species epithet *foetida* is the female form of the Latin word *foetidus*, meaning “bad smelling.” It refers to the foul smell emitted by the flowers and leaves, particularly in the summer. The common name “stopper” alludes to the plant's historical use as a treatment for diarrhea.

**Family:** Myrtaceae (Myrtle or eucalyptus family)

**Native range:** Coastal counties from Brevard south to the Keys and Manatee south to Monroe mainland counties

To see where natural populations of Spanish stopper have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zones 9–11

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moist to dry, well-drained calcareous, loamy or sandy soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade (ideal)

**Growth habit:** 9–15' tall

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** Spanish stopper's dense foliage and ability to be pruned into any desired shape makes it a good option for a hedge or buffer, as well as an accent or specimen plant. Its slender form make it especially suited for narrow spaces. It is moderately drought tolerant and can withstand hurricane winds.

Spanish stopper is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.