

STRAWBERRY TREE

Jamaican Cherry, Capulin Blanco, Panamaberry, Jam Fruit

Muntingia calabura

Muntingiaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Muntingia calabura is indigenous to much of Latin America including the islands of the Greater Antilles, St. Vincent, and Trinidad, hence the name Jamaica Cherry. This is a very fast-growing tree of slender proportions, reaching 7.5-12 m (25 to 40 ft) in height, with spreading, nearly horizontal branches.

Uses

The fruit is small (1 cm wide), red, and consumed fresh. The leaves and flowers can be infused to produce a tea valued medicinally to relieve headaches and the first symptoms of a cold. The wood is valued for fuel and general carpentry. The bark is used in place of twine for lashing together the supports of houses. In Brazil, the tree is planted along river banks, so the flowers and fruit fall into the water attracting fish for the benefit of the fishermen. The tree also provides quick shade useful for nursery plants, livestock, and agricultural crops.

Common Names

Cultivation

- Elevation: 0-1300 m (4300 ft)
- Rainfall: 1000-2000 mm (40-80 in), though somewhat drought tolerant
- Soil: will grow in alkaline or acidic soils; prefers well-drained conditions.

The seed is exceedingly small, but plentiful and can be sown fresh or cleaned and stored for later use. Seed is suspended in water and spread as evenly as possible on soil in trays or cells. Seed can only be covered with the smallest bit of soil, and should be kept moist and in the shade. Germination should begin within 10 days. Begin thinning the plants about two weeks after germination. The strawberry tree is also quickly propagated by cuttings. The tree will fruit 18 months from seeding and be 4 m (12 ft) tall in two years. During the four coldest months of a sub-tropical climate, the tree does not flower or fruit. It can also die due to freezes if it is not in a well-protected area. The strawberry tree is drought resistant, but may be damaged by wind and flooding and is not salt tolerant.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Fruit is ready to eat when it is red in color. Placing blankets or plastic beneath the tree and shaking the tree easily harvests the fruit. Seed should be harvested or used when the seed is ripe or overripe.

Pests and Diseases

In Florida (but not at ECHO), the fruit has recently become infested with the Caribbean fruit fly larvae making the fruit unfit to eat. The leaves are subject to leaf spot and the tree is subject to crown gall.

Cooking and Nutrition

The fruit can be eaten out of hand or used in tarts, jams, and fruit salads. The skin has a resinous flavor that can be avoided by squeezing the pulp out. At ECHO, we have only had success using the fruit fresh or frozen in salads.

References

<http://ecocrop.fao.org/ecocrop/srv/en/cropView?id=1500>

Clemens Bayer, Mark W. Chase, and Michael F. Fay. "Muntingiaceae, a New Family of Dicotyledons with Malvacean Affinities." *Taxon* 47, no. 1 (1998): 37-42. doi:10.2307/1224016.