Acerola

Malpighia emarginata

Height: 18 feet

Spread: 15 feet

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 10

Other Names: Barbados Cherry, West Indian Cherry

Description:

A tropical, fruit bearing shrub or small tree, with a nice upright habit and dark green foliage; red-pink flowers are followed by edible fruits that are high in vitamin C; requires wind protection because of shallow roots; great for the back of borders



Acerola flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



Acerola
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Ornamental Features

Acerola features showy clusters of fragrant pink flowers at the ends of the branches from late spring to early summer. The fruits are showy scarlet drupes which fade to dark red over time, which are carried in abundance from late summer to mid fall. It has dark green evergreen foliage. The fuzzy oval leaves remain dark green throughout the winter.

This plant is primarily grown as an ornamental, but it's also valued for its edible qualities. The round sweet fruit is most often used in the following ways:

- Fresh Eating
- Baking
- Preserves
- Juice-Making

Landscape Attributes

Acerola is a multi-stemmed evergreen shrub with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This shrub will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and should only be pruned after flowering to avoid removing any of the current season's flowers. It is a good choice for attracting birds, bees and butterflies to your yard. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Messy

Acerola is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Hedges/Screening
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting



Acerola fruit
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Planting & Growing

Acerola will grow to be about 18 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 15 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 40 years or more. This is a self-pollinating variety, so it doesn't require a second plant nearby to set fruit.

This shrub should only be grown in full sunlight. It prefers dry to average moisture levels with very well-drained soil, and will often die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for xeriscaping or the moisture-conserving landscape. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in sandy soils, and is able to handle environmental salt. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution, and will benefit from being planted in a relatively sheltered location. This species is not originally from North America.

Acerola makes a fine choice for the outdoor landscape, but it is also well-suited for use in outdoor pots and containers. Its large size and upright habit of growth lend it for use as a solitary accent, or in a composition surrounded by smaller plants around the base and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when grown in a container, it may not perform exactly as indicated on the tag - this is to be expected. Also note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.