



Florida Department of Environmental Protection

# WEED ALERT

## Melaleuca

(*Melaleuca quinquenervia*)



Above: *Melaleuca* capsules and seeds  
Left: *Melaleuca* flowers

**Melaleuca** is a large evergreen tree typically 65 feet in height with a brownish white, many-layered papery bark. Native to Australia and Malaysia, melaleuca was introduced into Florida in 1906 as a potential commercial timber and later extensively sold as a landscape ornamental tree and windbreak. It was also planted to dry up the Everglades to decrease mosquito populations and allow for development. Population estimates indicate melaleuca trees inhabit more than 400 thousand acres, mostly in south Florida.

Melaleuca trees grow quickly, typically 3-6 feet per year, in disturbed wet pine flatwoods, marshes and swamps. This non-native tree is rapidly displacing native cypress and sawgrass in the Everglades. Melaleuca can flower five times per year. Any damage to the tree that cuts water flow to the stems containing seed capsules, such as fires, freezes, and control techniques, will result in seed release. Seeds can remain viable for 10 years, and a single tree can store 2-20 million seeds.

### Why melaleuca must be managed:

Melaleuca forms dense stands resulting in the almost total displacement of native plants that are important to wildlife. In the Everglades, melaleuca trees form nearly monospecific forests in formerly treeless sawgrass marshes, disrupting historical water flows. Melaleuca forests represent a serious fire hazard to surrounding developed areas because of the oils contained within the leaves that create hot crown fires.

### Environmental damage caused by melaleuca forests:

- ▶ Melaleuca forests provide relatively poor habit for wildlife and almost totally displace native plant species thus decreasing biodiversity.
- ▶ Melaleuca invasions alter the landscape of the Everglades by creating monospecific forests in formerly treeless sawgrass marshes.
- ▶ Melaleuca forests alter ecosystem properties such as water flow in the Everglades.
- ▶ Dense stands of melaleuca trees produce hot crown fires that result in native tree mortality and pose a significant threat to developed areas.



Dense melaleuca tree stand in a Florida waterway


*Because of its aggressive growth rate, never plant melaleuca.*


*Possession of melaleuca with the intent to sell or plant is illegal in Florida without a special permit.*


# Melaleuca *Melaleuca quinquenervia*


Synonymy: *Metrosideros quinquenervia*, *M. coriacea*, *M. albida*, *Melaleuca rubriflora*, *M. maidenii*, *M. smithii*, *M. cunninghamii*

Melaleuca trees have extensively invaded southern Florida displacing native vegetation in wetland and upland environments.

 **Leaves:** alternate, simple, grayish green, narrowly lance shaped, to 10 cm (4 in) long and 2 cm (3/4 in) wide, with the smell of camphor when crushed.

 **Stems:** trunks to 33 m (100 ft) tall, with brownish-white, many layered, peeling, papery bark.

 **Flowers:** in creamy white to pinkish “bottle brush” spikes to 16 cm (6 in) long.

 **Fruit:** broadly cylindrical, thick-walled, capsules to 3 mm (3/8 in) wide, in clusters surrounding young stems; each capsule holding 200-300 tiny seeds.

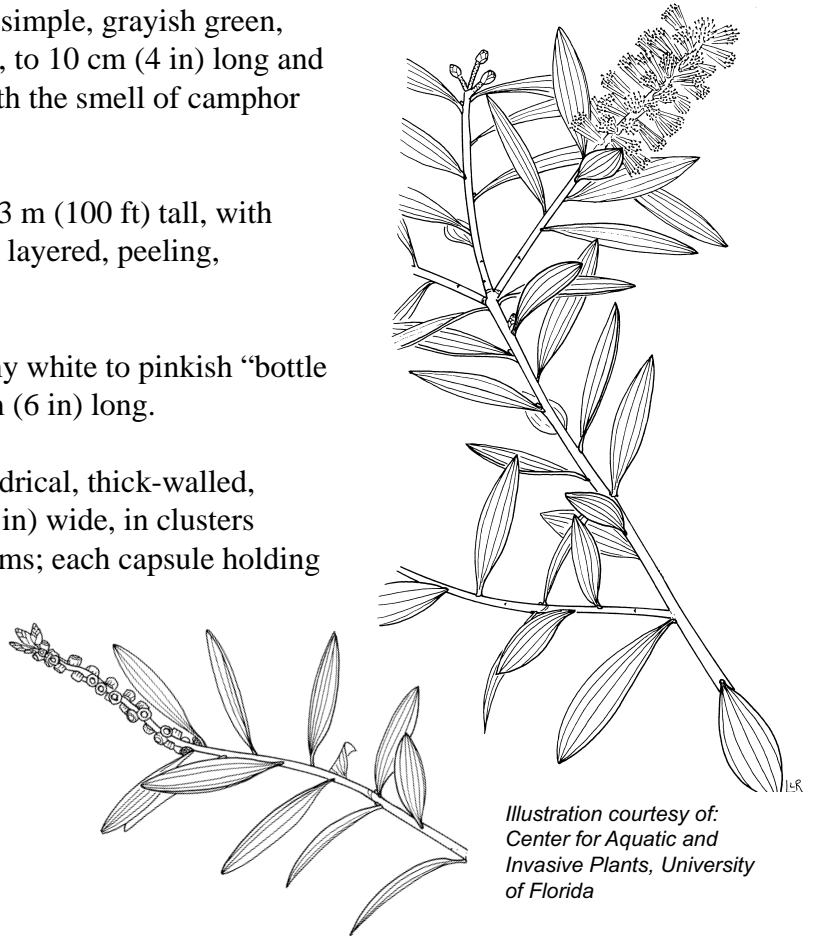


Illustration courtesy of:  
Center for Aquatic and  
Invasive Plants, University  
of Florida

## LOOK FOR FIRST:

Papery, brownish-white bark

Stiff, lanceolate leaves

Spikes of creamy-white to pinkish flowers

**Distribution** - origin in New Guinea and Australia; widely established in central and south Florida.

