

Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*)

The red mulberry is native to the Eastern states, including Florida. Small trees can grow very fast, sometimes exceeding 5 foot a year, but sometimes they need a year to get settled. We propagate a few varieties, but the "6th Street" is generally our preferred. It has large and good tasting berries that are produced most abundantly. The "Cedar Key" is the best tasting we've come across, and the fruit is larger than "6th Street" but it usually breaks dormancy earlier than "6th Street" and is more often damaged by late frosts. The "Illinois Everbearing" sometimes doesn't leaf out till June, and its fruiting season is more spread-out. The "white" is actually the Asian specie *Morus alba*, and is historically used to feed silk worms. We expect it to behave similarly to the natives.



Soil: Mulberries will tolerate most soil conditions, but seem to prefer rich and moist. In Gainesville they are often observed growing on creek banks. A little fertilizer may help it grow faster and produce more heavily, but is not needed.

Water: In dry areas, especially during droughts, irrigation may be helpful, but is usually unnecessary (except for establishment of new plants, as with nearly all plant species).

Sun: full sun to shade, but not deep shade.

Cold: Mulberries are deciduous, and tolerate cold well when they are dormant. New leaves and fruit are often lost to late frosts, but will be replaced, though this weakens the tree.

Pruning: Prune as for any normal tree - remove branches forming angles acute of 45 degrees, or internal crossing branches. Cut at branch collar, etc. New plants may send up a strong shoot from near the bottom, going straight up that will become the main trunk. In that case, you might want to prune off the original extent of the plant instead of the shoot. You may wish to wait a few years to see what shape the tree takes before deciding which branches and stems to keep/remove, except in the case of co-dominant trunks. Cuts of more than 2" diameter may not heal and should be avoided.



Propagation: Favored varieties are cloned by stem cuttings in the early fall. Seedlings are often males and produce no fruit.

Pests: Mulberries are attacked by a variety of sucking insects. They can be sprayed with a variety of organic insecticides, but are usually temporary and do not kill the tree. They can be a symptom of over fertilization. Potassium may aid the tree's natural defenses.

Harvesting, storage, and preparation: Berries are most efficiently harvested by spreading sheets under the tree, and shaking it. They can be eaten raw or used in pies or wine. Refrigeration in a closed bag or container will keep them for a few days, dehydration will keep them for a long time as mulraisons.