

Plant of the Week

Citharexylum spinosum

Florida Fiddlewood



The **Florida Fiddlewood** is popular with gardeners in northern and north-western Sydney. This lovely small tree has attractive, glossy foliage but for all that, likes to do its own thing, retaining green leaves through Autumn and Winter, then producing apricot, copper and bronze 'Autumn foliage' in Spring! It is easy to walk right past Fiddlewood trees until you smell their sweet fragrance and that will have you searching for the sprays (racemes) of tiny, delicate white flowers hidden amongst the leaves.

The Fiddlewood belongs to the plant family **Verbenaceae** and is found in southern **Florida**, the **West Indies**, **Guyana**, **Suriname** and **Venezuela**. The name comes from the Greek: *kithara* (κithάρα) – **lyre** and *xylon* (ξύλον) – **wood**. The timber is used in the Caribbean for the manufacture of stringed musical instruments and also for cabinet making¹. Fiddlewood is treasured as an ornamental garden plant. It is interesting that in Florida, Fiddlewood is recommended for the restoration of disturbed environments whereas elsewhere in the world, in Queensland and Hawaii, for example, it is considered to be an invasive species and planting is not recommended².

The **Lantana bug**, *Aconophora compressa*, introduced into Australia to control **Lantana** (which is also in the Verbenaceae), attacks Fiddlewood too. In Queensland where Fiddlewood trees have become a problem, this may be a good thing, but the bug has spread south to the northern beaches of Sydney, much to the despair of keen gardeners. The bug is susceptible to temperatures in excess of 37°C for more than a few days³ so perhaps its survival in the future may not be guaranteed.

¹Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citharexylum_spinosum

²Global Invasive Database:

<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=1059&fr=1&sts=>

³Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries:
http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_9488.htm#9542

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