



## Elaeocarpus decipiens - Japanese Blueberry Tree



### Habit and Cultural Information

Category: Tree  
Family: Elaeocarpaceae (Elaeocarpus<sup>1</sup>)  
Origin: Japan (Asia)  
Evergreen: Yes  
Red/Purple Foliage: Yes  
Flower Color: Cream  
Bloomtime: Summer  
Fragrant Flowers: Yes  
Height: 25-40 feet  
Width: 15-30 feet  
Exposure: Sun or Shade  
Irrigation: Medium Water Needs  
Winter Hardiness: 10-15° F

*Elaeocarpus decipiens* (Japanese Blueberry Tree) - A beautiful, broad-leaved evergreen large shrub or tree, typically growing 20 to 35 feet in height with an equal spread but may become larger with time as trees in nature are known to be nearly twice as tall. It has dense compact growth and nice branching structure with spring flushes of bronze growth that matures to a lush and shiny dark green elliptical leaves (size) Previous year's leaves also add color as they turn a nice orange color and linger for several months prior to dropping and then attractively littering ground. In summer, and nearly hidden within the canopy, appear the lightly fragrant small cream-colored flowers that hang downwards with delicate dissected fringed petals. The flowers are followed by the small oblong bluish purple colored fruits that give this plant its common name. Plant in full sun or partial shade in a decently well-drained soil and water regularly at least until well established. Though not a "drought tolerant" species, it does grow well enough, at least in cooler coastal gardens, when given only occasional irrigation but it noted as best with fairly regular irrigation such as it would get growing in a lawn. It has proven cold hardy at least into USDA Zone 8 locations and has grown well in the Pacific Northwest in Portland and Seattle as well as in Southern California so is quite adaptable. Japanese Blueberry is a low maintenance, small to medium sized garden, or street tree that has proven itself to adaptable to many climates and relatively pest free. It is also useful as a larger shrub and can be used for hedging and large scale privacy screen and windbreaks. It is most stunning when holding the bluish purple fruit against the bright red older leaves in summer, but this tree looks attractive year-round and attractive to bees, butterflies and birds. Some complain of the fruit drop while others note that it does not stain pavement. This plant first collected in 1853 by Charles Wright on the Ryukyu Islands (Loo-Choo Islands) in Japan. According to the Flora of China it also grows in evergreen forests from 1,300 to nearly 8,000 feet in elevation through much of China and in Vietnam. It is very similar to *Elaeocarpus sylvestris* and some sources consider *E. decipiens* to be a synonym of *E. sylvestris* but the Flora of China lists them as distinct species. In an excellent online article about this tree for *Pacific Horticulture* titled "**Striving for Diversity: Japanese Blueberry Tree**", author Dr. Matt Ritter (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo botany professor and tree book author) notes "It was initially introduced as *E. decipiens*, but that name is sometimes treated as a synonym of *E. sylvestris*; the nomenclature remains somewhat muddled." The name of the genus comes from the Greek words 'elaia' that was used to describe the olive and 'karpos' meaning "fruit" in reference to the oily olive shaped fruit. The specific epithet comes from the Greek word 'decipio' meaning "to catch" "entrap" or "take" though the reason for his name is not clear. Nursery friend, the late Morgan "Bill" Evans (landscape designer of Disneyland and other Disney parks), first introduced us to this plant and was instrumental in introducing Japanese Blueberry Tree to West Coast horticulture as part of what he called the Shogon series of plants. This description of *Elaeocarpus decipiens* is based on our research and our observations of this plant growing in the nursery, in our own garden and in other gardens. We would appreciate getting feedback of any kind from those who have any additional information about this plant, particularly if they disagree with what we have written.