

SCHEFFLERA ACTINOPHYLLA (ENDL.) HARMS

Araliaceae/Aralia or Ginseng Family

Common Names: Schefflera, Queensland umbrella tree, octopus tree

Synonymy: *Brassaia actinophylla* Endl.

Origin: Northern Australia, New Guinea, Java

Botanical Description: Evergreen tree to 12 m (40 ft) tall, with single or multistemmed trunks and greenish bark. Leaves alternate with petioles to 61 cm (2 ft) long; palmately compound with mostly 7-16 leaflets, these shiny, light green, oblanceolate, to 30 cm (12 in) long, with margins entire (or sparsely toothed when young). Flowers 25 mm (1 in) across, borne in dense clusters that form a large, red, showy inflorescence at stem tips above foliage. Fruit a purplish black, round, fleshy drupe to 7 mm (1/4 in) in diameter.

Ecological Significance: A common indoor plant that reaches tree size and produces huge numbers of seeds outdoors in central and southern Florida (Maxwell 1984). Introduced to Florida landscaping in 1927 and noted as escaping cultivation in southern Florida in the late 1970s, often growing as seedlings in the boots of cabbage palms in the manner of strangler figs (Morton 1976). Noted as escaping in Pinellas County in 1982 (Wunderlin). Now naturalized and spreading in a variety of habitats, from cypress strands to sand pine scrub, from the full sun of beach dunes to the deep shade of hammocks (Thayer 1998). Invading endangered remnants of scrub habitat, where it is shading out listed rare plants such as the Florida-threatened scrub pinweed, *Lechua cernua* Sm. (D. F. Austin, Florida Atlantic University, and K. C. Burks, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, personal observations). Extremely invasive in undisturbed tropical hardwood hammocks of Dade County, growing on trees and rocks as well as in soil (R. Hammer, Miami-Dade County Natural Resources Department, 1996 personal communication). Difficult to control (Thayer 1998).

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Flowers

Distribution: Native to northern Queensland in Australia, New Guinea, and Java, becoming weedy where introduced in southern Queensland (Austin 1996). In Florida, now reported in 28 designated natural areas of Monroe, Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Brevard, Collier, and Pinellas counties (EPPC 1996). Herbarium specimens collected from naturalized populations in Pinellas, Palm Beach, Broward, Dade, and Monroe counties (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995).

Life History: Restricted outdoors to warmer areas with minimum temperatures above 1.7°C (35°F) (Broschat and Meerow 1991). Grows on a variety of substrates. Flowers in summer and early fall, prolifically producing seeds. Seeds dispersed by birds, including crows, starlings, mockingbirds, and parrots (Austin 1996).

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In scrub habitat, Palm Beach County

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Growing on native palm