

November Jewels

The plants for this month are the acerola and its relatives, family **Malpighiaceae**, many of which thrive in Florida with little care. Acerola, also known as Barbados cherry and wild crepe myrtle, is *Malpighia glabra*, a slow-growing large shrub or small tree that flowers and fruits several times a year in Florida. For those of us original from northern states, the pink flowers are reminiscent of apple blossoms. The red fruit ripen very quickly, and don't keep more than a couple of days. That's ok, though, because you'll want to eat them right away. The flavor is somewhere between cherry and Granny Smith apple. They have the second highest vitamin C content of any fruit on the planet, after rose hips, the fruit of *Rosa rugosa*. One half-inch wide Barbados cherry supplies the adult daily requirement of vitamin C. The tree is not



fussy about soil, and very drought tolerant once established. It is damaged by temperatures below 30 degrees, however.

In the only case of a horticultural anagram that I've ever found, one of Malpighia's relatives is named *Galphimia gracilis*, golden thryallis. Its spikes of yellow flowers are produced most of the year, on a fast-growing, rounded shrub 4'-6' tall. It does best in full sun and fertile, sandy soil, with regular water. It sprouts readily from seed and makes a wonderful addition to a butterfly garden.



As well as trees and shrubs, the family Malpighiaceae includes vines. *Mascagnia macroptera*, the yellow butterfly or orchid vine, is fairly hardy and fast growing to 10'. It tolerates very hot sun or partial shade. Its sister species, *Mascagnia lilacina*, the lilac orchid vine, grows a bit slower and taller, to 15'. It also tolerates hot sun, and is even cold hardier. Another orchid vine, *Stigmaphyllon ciliatum*, has a more interesting form to its leaves and flowers, but is less cold hardy. All three orchid vines do best with regular water.

