

# Nature Notes

...from Sharon

This is a native plant in regions from coastal south Florida, through the West Indies, and into parts of Central and South America. According to the University of Florida's Cooperative Extension Service, this native plant has been rated by some as one of the best home landscape shrubs for the south Florida area and could be used as a specimen plant or trimmed into a hedge. Because this is a slow growing plant for nurseries, you may have to look extensively to find one for your yard.

It is an evergreen shrub with small, shiny, leathery leaves that cluster at the tips of branches. The undersides of the green leaves are lighter than the top sides. It can grow to 6 – 8 feet high, with the crown spread of 5 – 8 feet in diameter. The plant is supported by an extensive tap and lateral root system, which helps stabilize the surrounding soil and provides extraordinary support during high winds, such as tropical storms and hurricanes. The roots have a corky, ivory colored bark and are stiff and woody.

## White Indigoberry (*Randia aculeate*)



The trunks are thin and can appear leggy. In fact, this plant has also been known as the “fishing pole” tree, because its thin straight trunks were sometimes used to make fishing poles. The branches are opposite with gray bark that is smooth to slightly fissured. Some White Indigoberry are said to have spines, but not always. This plant likes well-drained sandy soils in full sun. It will tolerate partial shade and some salt spray. It can tolerate some cold, but not extreme freezing temperatures. You will find the White Indigoberry growing in unburned pinelands and along the margins of coastal hammocks. The easiest ones to spot at Barefoot Beach Preserve are located adjacent to the west side of the chickee hut—just off the west Saylor Trail. These are currently bearing fruit.



The leaves are nearly stalkless, entire, ovate, and less than two inches long. It produces small, white, single flowers with five petals that are fragrant. After flowering, the female plants have showy white fruits that give this plant its common name. The berry-like fruit has a brittle white hull with bluish-black (indigo) pulp. Each fruit has an average of 8 seeds inside; however can have up to 18. Reproduction may be from air-dried seed and you must be very patient, as it is very slow growing. It blooms and fruits irregularly throughout the year.



The small .5 to 1-inch fruits are edible although of poor flavor. It provides food and nesting sites for birds, as well as nectar for butterflies. The fruits are used in herbal medicine to control dysentery. University of Florida (Liogier 1990) indicated an unspecified part of the plant is used to control fever and the latex is reported to effectively stop bleeding.