Dwarf Red Bottlebrush
Callistemon citrinus 'Little John'

INTRODUCTION
The common name, "bottlebrush", perfectly describes this evergreen plant’s bright red flower spikes. Hummingbirds love the flowers, and the plant is harder than most Bottlebrushes. The flowers are followed by small, woody capsules that look like bead bracelets on the bark, and which last for years. Offered as a shrub, Bottlebrush can be trained as a tree to 15 feet or espaliered as a quick wall cover. It makes a nice screen or tall unclipped hedge. Pruning to develop several trunks and removing some lower branches can create a fine small specimen tree. Callistemon citrinus 'Little John' is a dwarf cultivar which produces masses of flowers, and which has blue-green foliage. It is a slow grower to only 3 feet tall, 5 feet wide.

GENERAL INFORMATION
Scientific name: Callistemon citrinus
Pronunciation: kal-liss-STEE-mawn sih-TRY-nus
Common name(s): Red Bottlebrush
Family: Myrtaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION
Height: 10 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round; upright
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: medium
Texture: fine
Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: lanceolate; linear
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy
Flower
Flower color: red
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: gray
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture
Light requirement: tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other
Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT
A good choice for a spot offering full sun, it will adapt to a variety of soils. Very drought-tolerant once established, Bottlebrush tolerates any soil except very poor, alkaline, or poorly-drained. Fertilize regularly for good flower color and dark green foliage. Suckers from the trunk need to be removed periodically to maintain tree form. Propagation is usually from cuttings as it is variable when grown from seed.

Pests
No particular insect pests are listed for Callistemon.

Diseases
If the soil is too moist, root and crown-attacking fungus diseases can be a problem. Prevention is your best hope--keep the plant on the dry side with low fertility and good air circulation. A twig gall, formed in response to a fungus (Sphaeropsis tumefacens), can disfigure the tree. Chlorosis, a systemic condition which causes new leaves to turn yellow, can be corrected with treatment of the soil using iron sulfate or iron chelate.

by Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson