**Cordia sebestena**
*Geiger-Tree*

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

This dense, rounded, evergreen native tree grows slowly to a height of 25 feet with an equal spread and can develop a trunk 12 inches thick (Fig. 1). The large, seven-inch-long, stiff, dark green leaves are rough and hairy, feeling much like sandpaper. Appearing throughout the year, but especially in spring and summer, are dark orange, two-inch-wide flowers which appear in clusters at branch tips. The splendid flowers are followed by one to two-inch-long, pear-shaped fruits, which have a pleasant fragrance but are not particularly tasty.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

*Scientific name:* *Cordia sebestena*  
*Pronunciation:* KOR-dee-uh seb-ess-TAY-nuh  
*Common name(s):* Geiger-Tree  
*Family:* Boraginaceae  
*USDA hardiness zones:* 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
*Origin:* native to North America  
*Uses:* container or above-ground planter; 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; shade tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree  
*Availability:* somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**DESCRIPTION**

*Height:* 25 to 30 feet  
*Spread:* 20 to 25 feet  
*Crown uniformity:* symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms  
*Crown shape:* round; vase shape

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1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-182, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
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Cordia sebestena -- Geiger-Tree

Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: undulate
Leaf shape: cordate; ovate
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: orange
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: green; white
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: medium
Wood specific gravity: 0.70

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Figure 3. Foliage of Geiger-Tree.

Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
**Drought tolerance:** high
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high
**Soil salt tolerance:** good

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
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Growing in full sun to partial shade, Geiger-Tree is tolerant of light, sandy, alkaline soils and salt-spray. It is highly recommended for seaside plantings. Do not plant where there is the slightest danger of frost.

*Cordia boissieri* is frost-resistant (tolerating temperatures in the high 20’s) and has stunning white flowers with yellow centers.

Propagation is by seeds or layering.

**Pests**

Mites, scales, and caterpillars will occasionally attack Geiger-Tree. The geiger beetle defoliates the tree upon occasion but the trees generally grow out of it and do fine. The problem can be locally troublesome.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.