**Kalopanax pictus**

**Castor-Aralia**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**INTRODUCTION**

With massive, spreading branches and large, 7 to 12-inch-diameter, dark green, multi-lobed leaves, Castor-Aralia provides dense shade below its canopy and makes an ideal shade tree (Fig. 1). Growing 40 to 50 feet high with an equal spread, Castor-Aralia is deciduous, the leaves turning a faint red in fall before dropping. While the young stems are armed with short, yellow prickles, the mature trunk is attractively ridged and blackened. The one-inch-diameter, white flowers appear in dense, 12 to 24-inch-long terminal panicles and attract quite a few bees. This is not a problem on larger specimens since flowers are borne up in the tree away from the ground. The small black fruit which ripens in early fall is eagerly consumed by birds.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Kalopanax pictus*

**Pronunciation:** kal-oh-PAN-acks PICK-tus

**Common name(s):** Castor-Aralia, Prickly Castor-Oil Tree

**Family:** Araliaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 7 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

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**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 40 to 60 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette

**Crown shape:** round

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** coarse

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: lobed
Leaf shape: star-shaped
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: red; yellow
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: black
Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; thorns are present on the trunk or branches
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: stout

Culture

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

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

This tree could be planted more often in landscapes, but seeds germinate readily in the landscape. Use it with caution near open fields and wetlands. The large size and coarse texture probably make it best suited for large-scale landscapes, such as golf courses, parks, business complexes and campuses, but it could be tried along streets where there is plenty of soil space for root expansion.

Castor-Aralia should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil and will tolerate alkaline soil. While drought-tolerant once established, Castor-Aralia should receive ample moisture until then. Any pruning should be done in late spring, and Castor-Aralia is considered a long-lived tree.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.