**Leucaena retusa**
Goldenball Leadtree

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

Goldenball Leadtree is a native North American evergreen tree which reaches 25 feet in height and has blue/green to bright green foliage (Fig. 1). The showy, yellow to white, rounded blooms appear from April to October and are especially prominent after a heavy rain. The attractive fruits which follow ripen in late summer.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

*Scientific name:* *Leucaena retusa*
*Pronunciation:* loo-KAY-nuh ree-TOO-suh
*Common name(s):* Goldenball Leadtree, Littleleaf Leucaena, Littleleaf Leadtree
*Family:* Leguminosae
*USDA hardiness zones:* 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)
*Origin:* native to North America
*Uses:* Bonsai; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
*Availability:* grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

**DESCRIPTION**

*Height:* 20 to 25 feet
*Spread:* 15 to 25 feet
*Crown uniformity:* irregular outline or silhouette
*Crown shape:* upright; vase shape
*Crown density:* open
*Growth rate:* medium
*Texture:* fine

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Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod  
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches  
Fruit covering: dry or hard  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; 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; showy trunk; no thorns  
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure  
Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break  
Current year twig color: brown  
Current year twig thickness: thin

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: no special winter interest  
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape  
Pest resistance: unknown

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The crown can develop a one-sided or asymmetrical habit when it is young, so pruning and training may be needed to form a more uniformly shaped crown. The drooping habit of the branches makes it difficult to maintain near a street, but it would make a nice accent tree for the shrub border or backyard garden. The tree tends to seed itself into the surrounding landscape and spreads rapidly. Some consider it a weed, and the wood is brittle.
Goldenball Leadtree should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil and will tolerate alkaline conditions very well. Care must be taken in the placement of this tree in the landscape since the wood is susceptible to breakage in wind- and ice-storms. Plant it in a spot protected from the wind.

Propagation is by seed.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.