Podocarpus gracilior
Weeping Podocarpus

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This 30 to 50-foot evergreen has a soft, graceful, billowy appearance of bright green new growth, dark green mature leaves, and weeping branch tips (Fig. 1). If left unpruned the lower branch tips will touch the ground and the tree will appear as a stack of foliage emerging from the earth. With lower limbs removed a rounded vase shape or oval emerges creating dense shade beneath. Often used as an espalier, Fern Podocarpus is quite striking when used as a specimen, shade tree, or screening plant. It can make a beautiful street or parking lot tree but lower branches need to be removed with time as the tree grows since they tend to droop and could hinder traffic visibility. But this is a small price to pay for this wonderful tree. This is a tough plant which can grow very well in urban conditions. The trunk will slowly grow to be two feet in diameter or larger. Very adapted to downtown, restricted-soil planting sites, the roots rarely lift sidewalks or cause other problems.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Podocarpus gracilior
Pronunciation: poe-doe-KAR-pus grass-ILL-ee-or
Common name(s): Weeping Podocarpus, Fern Podocarpus
Family: Podocarpaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; hedge; suitable for growing indoors; 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; screen; trainable as a standard; shade tree; specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or

Figure 1. Middle-aged Weeping Podocarpus.
Podocarpus gracilior -- Weeping Podocarpus

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

drought are common

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 30 to 50 feet
- **Spread:** 25 to 35 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
- **Crown shape:** oval; weeping
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** slow
- **Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite; spiral (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** entire
- **Leaf shape:** linear
- **Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see; parallel
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** yellow
- **Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** irregular; round
- **Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch
- **Fruit covering:** fleshy
- **Fruit color:** red
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green
Current year twig thickness: medium

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: low

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: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Growing yellow flowering ground covers planted under the tree. It compliments glass-sided structures well, its soft foliage shimmering and reflecting on a breezy, sunny day.

Growing in full sun or partial shade, it will tolerate a wide range of well-drained soils and should be protected from frost. In Florida, it is considerably tolerant of dry soils requiring no irrigation once established.

Propagation is by cuttings or layerings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. A very durable, low-maintenance tree which should be grown by nursery operators for use in urban and suburban landscapes.

Used as a large patio tree, the fine-textured foliage is sure to draw a complimentary remark from visitors and friends. Almost appearing like a large, soft, green cloud, Fern Podocarpus creates a beautiful effect when placed beside a pond or other water interest. The tree combines well with Yellow Lantana or other low-