



Podocarpus gracilior Weeping Podocarpus¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

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

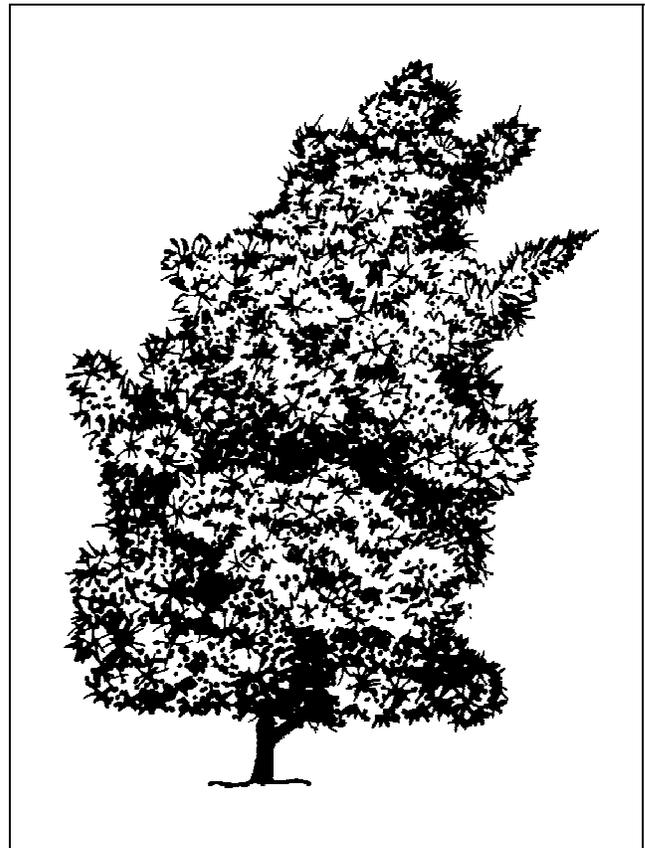


Figure 1. Middle-aged Weeping Podocarpus.

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

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



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

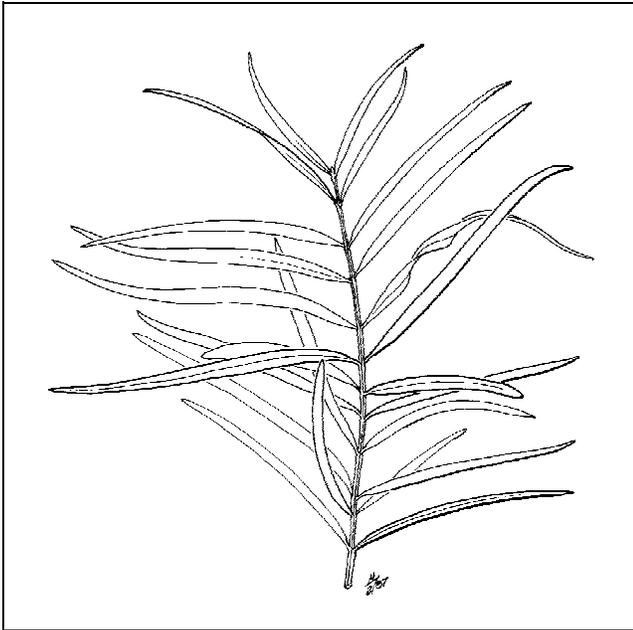


Figure 3. Foliage of Weeping Podocarpus.

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

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-

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.