**Ungnadia speciosa**  
**Mexican-Buckeye**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

Mexican Buckeye is a native North American deciduous tree or large shrub which reaches 20 to 30 feet in height with a spread of 20 feet (Fig. 1). The spreading, irregular crown is composed of many small, upright branches which along with the persistent seedpods and smooth, mottled gray/brown bark helps make Mexican Buckeye an attractive feature in the winter landscape. The pinnately compound, dark green leaves turn a beautiful bright yellow color in fall before dropping. In spring the tree is also quite colorful when the showy, fragrant, purple blooms appear, either just before or with the new, fresh leaves. The showy, three-pod seeds contain sweet seeds which are poisonous. It is reported that children in west Texas have used the round seeds as a substitute for marbles. The seedpods persist on the bare branches throughout the winter.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Scientific name: *Ungnadia speciosa*  
Pronunciation: ung-NAW-dee-uh spee-see-OH-suh  
Common name(s): Mexican-Buckeye  
Family: Sapindaceae  
USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9A (Fig. 2)  
Origin: native to North America  
Uses: container or above-ground planter; 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 30 feet  
Spread: 15 to 20 feet  
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette  
Crown shape: oval  
Crown density: open  
Growth rate: medium  
Texture: fine

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound
- **Leaflet margin:** crenate; serrulate
- **Leaflet shape:** lanceolate; ovate
- **Leaflet venation:** pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- **Leaflet blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** yellow
- **Fall characteristic:** showy

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; 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:** thin

**Culture**

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

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** pink
- **Flower characteristics:** fall flowering; pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** oval; round
- **Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches
- **Fruit covering:** fleshy
- **Fruit color:** brown
Figure 3. Foliage of Mexican-Buckeye.

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

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

This small tree is probably best used as a specimen planted for the coarse leaf texture and striking fall color display. It would make a nice tall component in a shrub border or other grouping of shrubs. The corner of a large building could be buffered or softened by this tall shrub or small tree.

Mexican Buckeye should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil and prefers moist, alkaline soil. Established trees are quite drought-tolerant.

Propagation is easily done by seed.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.