



Cordia sebestena Geiger-Tree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This dense, rounded, evergreen native tree grows slowly to a height of 25 feet with an equal spread and can develop a trunk 12 inches thick (Fig. 1). The large, seven-inch-long, stiff, dark green leaves are rough and hairy, feeling much like sandpaper. Appearing throughout the year, but especially in spring and summer, are dark orange, two-inch-wide flowers which appear in clusters at branch tips. The splendid flowers are followed by one to two-inch-long, pear-shaped fruits, which have a pleasant fragrance but are not particularly tasty.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Cordia sebestena*

Pronunciation: KOR-dee-uh seb-ess-TAY-nuh

Common name(s): Geiger-Tree

Family: *Boraginaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; 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; near a deck or patio; shade tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

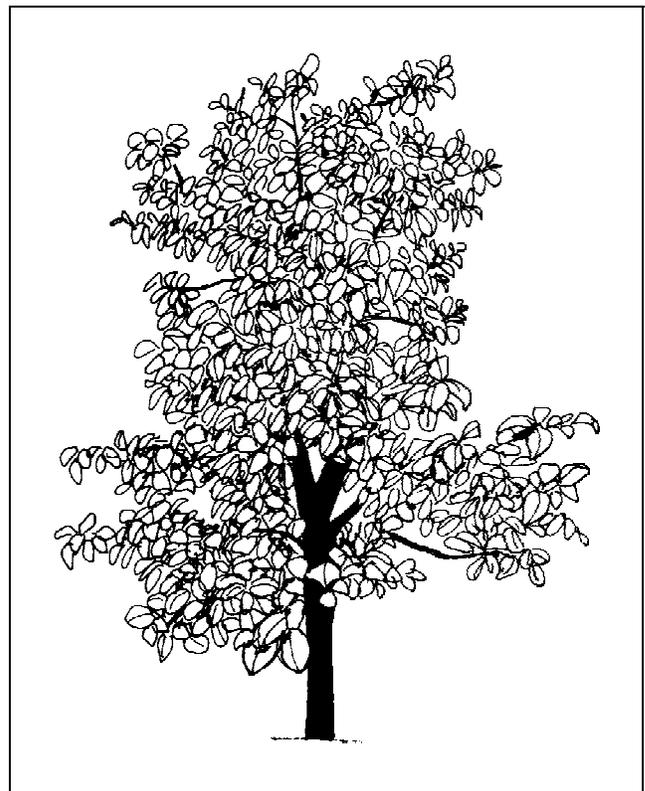


Figure 1. Young Geiger-Tree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet

Spread: 20 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; vase shape

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-182, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
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.

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: cordate; ovate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: orange

Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: green; white

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; 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: medium

Wood specific gravity: 0.70

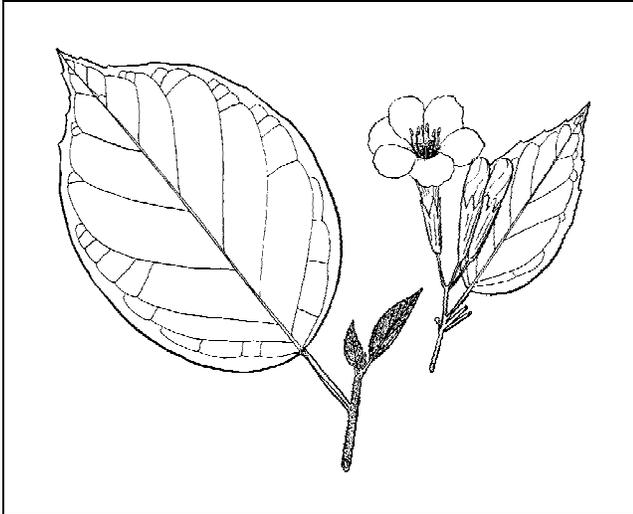


Figure 3. Foliage of Geiger-Tree.

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: high

Soil salt tolerance: good

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Geiger-Tree is quite salt- and brackish-water tolerant, making it ideal for use in coastal landscapes as a free-standing specimen, patio or framing tree. Most specimens are seen as multitrunked and low-branching but nurseries can produce single-trunked trees suitable for downtown and parking lots. It has been used as a street tree in some communities but drops leaves as a drought-avoidance strategy in prolonged dry spells. According to legend, the common name was bestowed by Audubon in commemoration of John Geiger, a Key West pilot and wrecker of the 19th century and is now used quite universally as the common name for this excellent Florida native tree.

Growing in full sun to partial shade, Geiger-Tree is tolerant of light, sandy, alkaline soils and salt-spray. It is highly recommended for seaside plantings. Do not plant where there is the slightest danger of frost.

Cordia boissieri is frost-resistant (tolerating temperatures in the high 20's) and has stunning white flowers with yellow centers.

Propagation is by seeds or layering.

Pests

Mites, scales, and caterpillars will occasionally attack Geiger-Tree. The geiger beetle defoliates the tree upon occasion but the trees generally grow out of it and do fine. The problem can be locally troublesome.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.