



Leucaena retusa Goldenball Leadtree¹

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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

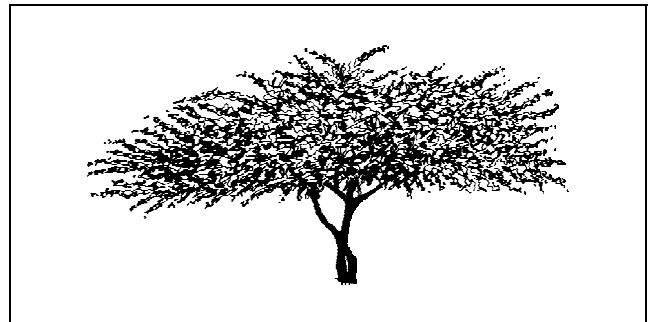


Figure 1. Middle-aged Goldenball Leadtree.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: bipinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire

Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); oblong

Leaflet venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaflet blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: fall flowering; summer flowering; very showy

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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.