



Sapindus saponaria Florida Soapberry¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Florida Soapberry grows at a moderate rate to 30 to 40 feet tall (Fig. 1). The pinnately compound, evergreen leaves are 12 inches long with each leaflet four inches long. Ten-inch-long panicles of small, white flowers appear during fall, winter, and spring but these are fairly inconspicuous. The fleshy fruits which follow are less than an inch-long, shiny, and orange/brown. The seeds inside are poisonous, a fact which should be considered in the tree's placement in the landscape, especially if children will be present. The bark is rough and gray. The common name of Soapberry comes from the soap-like material which is made from the berries in tropical countries.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Sapindus saponaria*

Pronunciation: SAP-in-dus sap-oh-NAIR-ee-uh

Common name(s): Florida Soapberry, Wingleaf Soapberry

Family: *Sapindaceae*

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

Origin: native to North America

Uses: wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; shade tree; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

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

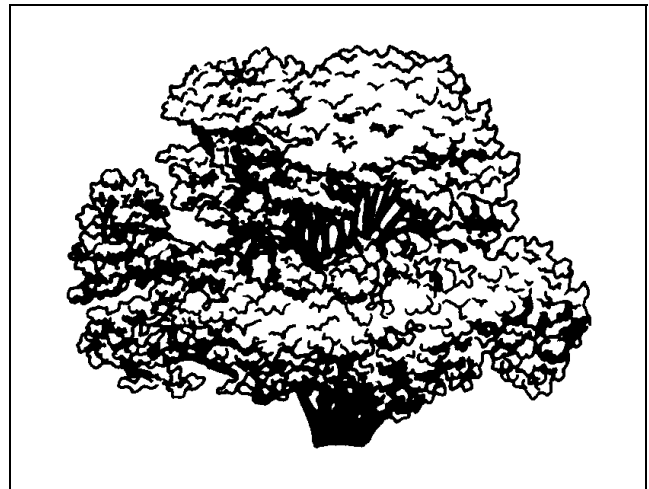


Figure 1. Mature Florida Soapberry.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 40 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: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: sinuate; undulate

Leaflet shape: lanceolate; linear

Leaflet venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-582, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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.

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: brown; orange

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; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; gray

Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest



Figure 3. Foliage of Florida Soapberry.

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

Soapberry can be planted in low maintenance landscapes for the unusually prominent, orange-colored berries. They require little care other than some initial pruning to direct growth and to develop a strong branch structure. The bushy growth habit of this medium-sized tree combines nicely with shrubs and ground covers planted beneath and around the tree. Fruits attract the boxelder bug.

Florida Soapberry should be grown in full sun and will tolerate almost any soil. It is highly drought- and salt-tolerant.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.