



Ungnadia speciosa Mexican-Buckeye¹

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.

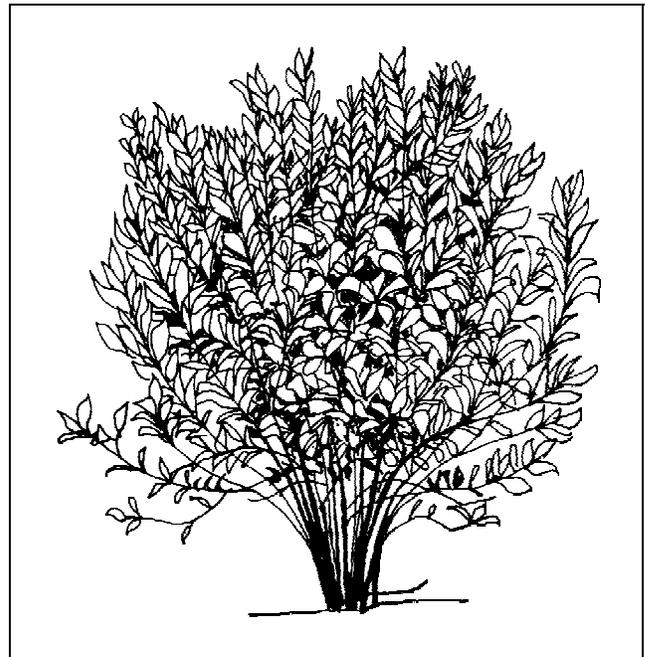


Figure 1. Young Mexican-Buckeye.

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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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.

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

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

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



Figure 3. Foliage of Mexican-Buckeye.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

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.