

Sapindus saponaria: Florida Soapberry¹

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Introduction

Florida soapberry grows at a moderate rate to 30 to 40 feet tall. The pinnately compound, evergreen leaves are 12 inches long with each leaflet four inches long. 10-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.



Figure 1. Mature *Sapindus saponaria*: Florida soapberry
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

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: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; reclamation; street without sidewalk; shade; highway median

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



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 40 feet

Spread: 25 to 35 feet

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Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: undulate, sinuate/undulate
Leaf shape: linear, lanceolate
Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen, evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

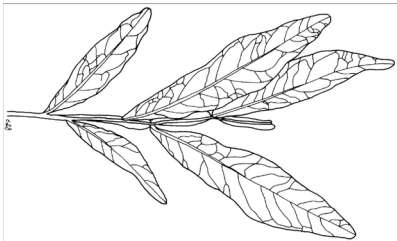


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: orange, brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: gray, brown
Current year twig thickness: medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: yes
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

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.