



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Turnea ulmifolia*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Yellow Alder is a small shrub native to the Caribbean basin (Fig. 1). Many stems originate close to the ground but they branch infrequently forming an open, leggy plant. Those in the full sun branch more and stay fuller than those in partial shade. Clear yellow flowers are produced daily, each lasting several hours before closing at night. New flowers open the next morning. Leaves stay dark green with little or no fertilizer.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Turnea ulmifolia*

**Pronunciation:** TERN-nee-uh ul-miff-FOLE-lee-uh

**Common name(s):** Yellow Elder, Yellow Alder

**Family:** *Turneraceae*

**Plant type:** ground cover

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** foundation; border; mass planting; ground cover; attracts butterflies

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### Description

**Height:** 2 to 3 feet

**Spread:** 2 to 3 feet

**Plant habit:** round

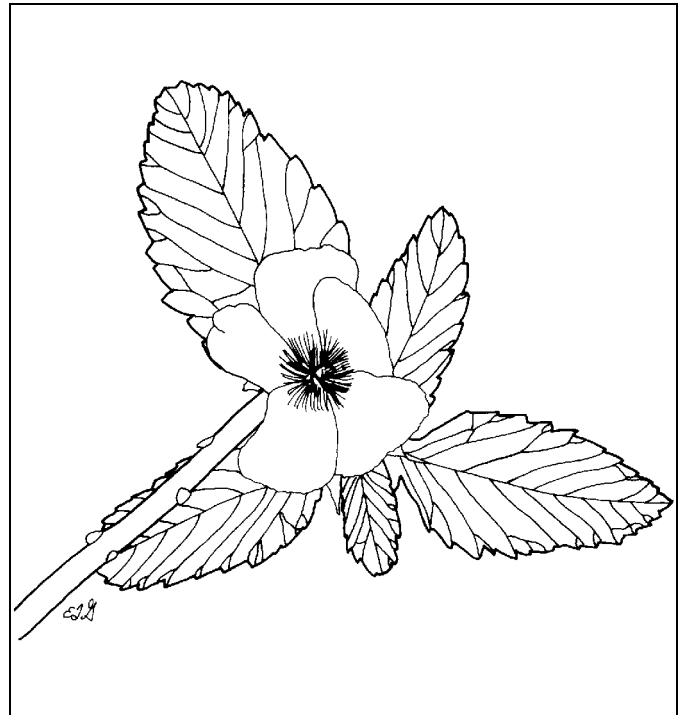


Figure 1. Yellow Elder.

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-593, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** yellow  
**Flower characteristic:** year-round flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** unknown  
**Fruit length:** unknown  
**Fruit cover:** unknown  
**Fruit color:** unknown  
**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
**Current year stem/twig color:** green  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun  
**Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay;  
**Drought tolerance:** moderate  
**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** may self-seed each year

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

## Use and Management

Space plants several feet apart to form a ground cover in one season. To thicken the plant, cut stems back when they become leggy to force new branches close to the ground. To use as a low maintenance plant, consider locating Alder alone as an accent in a shrub border or in a ground cover to display its natural open habit. It will display its bright yellow flowers on the outside edge of the plant without pruning. Alder seedlings often germinate near the plants and can become weeds in the landscape.

Plant Yellow Alder in the full sun or partial shade for best form and flowering. Plants appear to adapt to a variety of soil conditions including alkaline pH and dry sites. Freezing temperatures kill plants to the ground, but warm spring weather brings them back to life in central and south Florida.

### Pests and Diseases

White flies are often found on the foliage. Severe infestations can injure the plants. Aphids and scales can also infest the foliage but they are usually not to serious.