

Coccoloba uvifera Seagrape¹

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INTRODUCTION

Reaching a height of 25 to 30 feet, Seagrape can take on a variety of shapes, depending upon its location but typically forms a multi-stemmed vase shape if left unpruned (Fig. 1). The large, almost circular, broad, leathery, evergreen leaves of Seagrape have distinctive red veins. The leaves frequently turn completely red before they fall in winter. The new young foliage is a beautiful bronze color which is set off nicely against the dark green, shiny leaves. The inconspicuous ivory flowers are produced on foot-long racemes and are followed by dense clusters of 3/4-inch diameter green grapes on female trees only, ripening to a luscious deep purple in late summer. Males do not produce fruit. The grapes are often used to make a delicious jelly and are also popular with birds and squirrels.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Coccoloba uvifera*

Pronunciation: koe-koe-LOE-buh yoo-VIFF-er-uh

Common name(s): Seagrape

Family: *Polygonaceae*

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

Origin: native to North America

Uses: Bonsai; fruit tree; hedge; 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; screen; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common



Figure 1. Middle-aged Seagrape.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet

Spread: 20 to 30 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: medium

Texture: coarse

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-175, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate; reticulate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: red

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round (Fig. 3)

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: blue; purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; 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: 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: thick

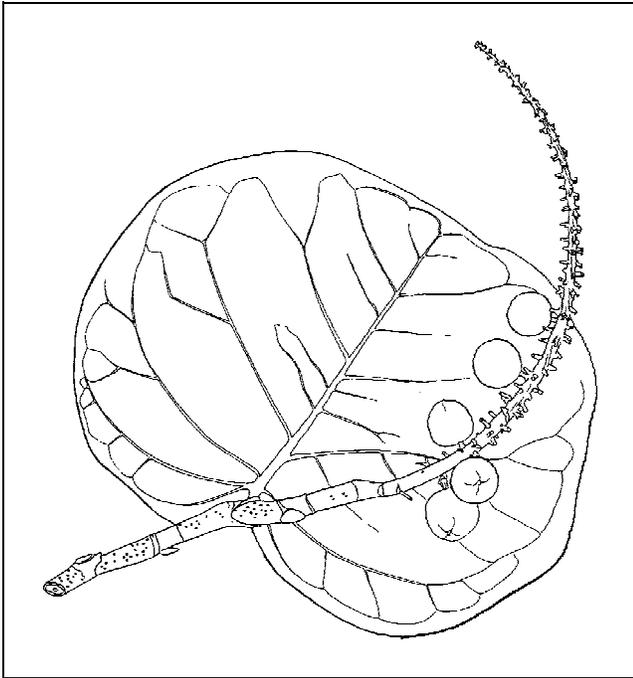


Figure 3. Fruit of Seagrape.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: good

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The contorted, twisting trunk (which can grow to two feet in diameter) and upright branching habit makes Seagrape an interesting, picturesque shade tree or specimen planting or, it can be pruned into a dense hedge, screen, or windbreak. Because of its size and coarse texture, Seagrape as a clipped hedge is more suited to foundation plantings for large buildings where it will lend a tropical effect. It is also used as a seaside hedge in commercial landscapes, but requires

hand pruning, since the large leaves do not lend themselves well to shearing.

Pruning is required two or three times during the first 10 years after planting to train the multiple trunks so they are well-attached to the tree. Be sure branches do not develop embedded bark, since they will be poorly attached to the trunk and could split from the trunk. But the wood and the tree is generally very strong and durable following this developmental and corrective pruning. The tree will then perform well with little care, except for occasional pruning of lower branches to create clearance for vehicles. Some people object to the litter created by the large, slowly-decomposing leaves which fall from the tree during the year.

Requiring full sun and sandy, well-drained soils, Seagrape is excellent for seaside locations since it is highly salt- and drought-tolerant. Plants should be well-watered until established and then should only require occasional pruning to control shape.

There is a variegated cultivar available.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests

Stems are subject to Seagrape borer which can kill branches.

A nipple gall causes raised, red nipples on the upper leaf surface.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.