**Ptelea trifoliata ‘Aurea’**  
‘Aurea’ Common Hoptree

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

This cultivar of the deciduous North American native tree reaches 15 feet in height with a spread of 10 to 15 feet and forms a broad, rounded canopy over a slender, grey trunk (Fig. 1). The trifoliate, four to six-inch-long leaves emerge a bright yellow changing to light green in summer, turning yellow in fall before dropping. Inconspicuous greenish-white flowers appear in terminal clusters in June and July, their presence easily detected by the delicious orange blossom-like perfume. The blooms are followed by interesting, one-inch-diameter, flattened, tan "wafers" which will persist on the tree if not first consumed by wildlife. In the past, this bitter fruit was used as a substitute for hops in brewing beer.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Scientific name: *Ptelea trifoliata* ‘Aurea’  
Pronunciation: TEE-lee-uh try-fole-ee-AY-tuh  
Common name(s): ‘Aurea’ Common Hoptree, ‘Aurea’ Wafer-Ash  
Family: Rutaceae  
USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 9A (Fig. 2)  
Origin: native to North America  
Uses: container or above-ground planter; near a deck or patio; specimen; no proven urban tolerance  
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

**DESCRIPTION**

Height: 5 to 15 feet  
Spread: 10 to 15 feet  
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette  
Crown shape: round; vase shape  
Crown density: moderate  
Growth rate: medium  
Texture: medium  

Foliage  
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: odd pinnately compound; trifoliate  
Leaflet margin: entire; serrate  
Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); oblong; ovate  
Leaflet venation: banchidodrome; pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

---

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-531, 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.
Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green; yellow
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower
Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; inconspicuous and not showy; summer flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; 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; 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: medium

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; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

One of a few small trees which performs well in deep shade. Plant it close to the patio or deck, or locate it in a shrub border for fragrant flowers and yellow fall color display. Its native habitat is dry, rocky upland sites making it well-suited for non-irrigated landscapes.

Naturally found in the shade along the edges of woods, especially on rocky slopes in the Mississippi Valley. Wafer-Ash can be planted in full sun to deep shade and prefers well-drained, fertile, moist soil. While plants are better off if not exposed to extremes of wetness or dryness, Wafer-Ash is drought-tolerant once established. Transplants readily from the field.

Other cultivars include: ‘Glauca’ with blue/green foliage.

Propagation is by seed, budding, layering, or grafting.

PESTS AND DISEASES

No pests or diseases are of major concern although it is occasionally bothered by tree-hoppers, leaf spot, and rust.