

Podocarpus macrophyllus Podocarpus¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

With densely foliated lower limbs which reach the ground and neat, dark green, evergreen leaves, Podocarpus is very popular as a dense screen or hedge (Fig. 1). However, Podocarpus can reach 40 to 50 feet in height when not sheared and is quite attractive as a tree with the lower branches removed, revealing the light brown, peeling bark. If space permits, leave the lower limbs on the tree for an almost spruce-like appearance. The tree grows in an open manner with large spaces between the branches creating a pleasing, irregular oval silhouette in middle and old age. The inconspicuous flowers are followed by fleshy, purple, small, edible fruits (very good to eat) on female trees which are quite attractive to birds but not really messy on sidewalks or pavement.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Podocarpus macrophyllus*

Pronunciation: poe-doe-KAR-pus mack-roe-FILL-us

Common name(s): Podocarpus, Yew-Pine, Japanese Yew

Family: Podocarpaceae

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: espalier; hedge; suitable for growing indoors; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a standard; shade tree; small

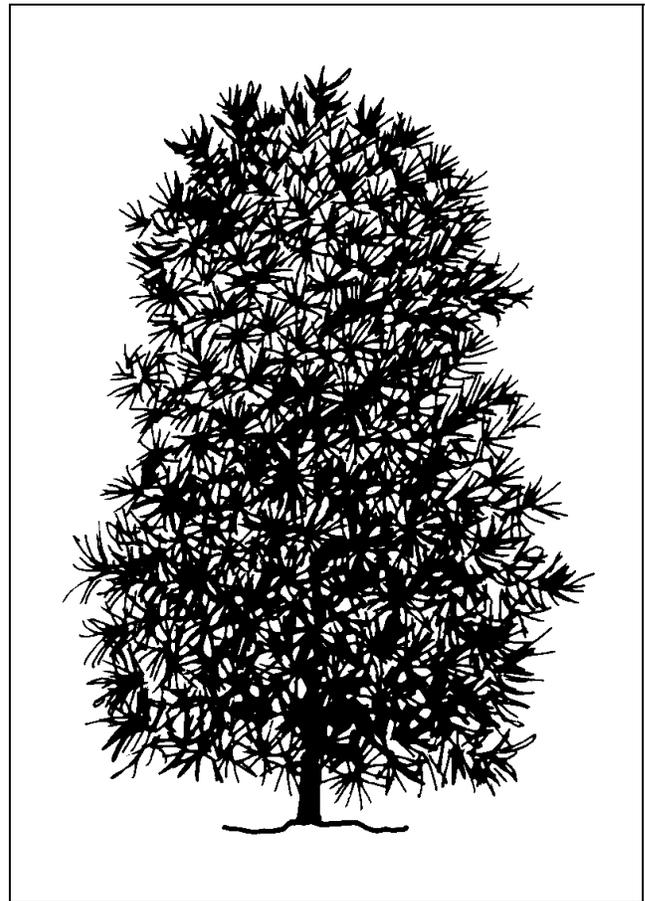


Figure 1. Young Podocarpus.

parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are

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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.

common

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 40 feet

Spread: 20 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate; opposite/subopposite; whorled (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular; oval; round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant



Figure 3. Foliage of Podocarpus.

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium; thick

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

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: moderate

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

This is one of a few trees which can be pruned into a nice hedge. The dark green foliage and dense growth creates a formal mass. It looks better when pruned with a hand pruner, not sheared with a hedge trimmer.

Showing best growth and form in full sun, Podocarpus will grow more slowly and have a looser appearance when grown in shade. It will grow on the north side of a tall building with little or no direct sun. It will tolerate a wide variety of well-drained, acidic soils. Don't plant on wet soils. This is a tough tree, adaptable to urban conditions and should be used much more extensively as a street tree. It should be used more in areas of poor soils and restricted rooting space. Unfortunately, most people choose to trim the tree into a column or hedge, so not many have seen the true beauty of the tree. It will make an attractive specimen, street or parking lot tree, even for the smallest soil space in a downtown planting pit. Roots are not a problem in restricted-soil planting areas and usually do not lift sidewalks.

Many varieties are available for selection of habit, leaf form, color, etc. *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. *angustifolius* is a narrow, columnar tree with curved leaves, 2 to 4.5 inches long; *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. *appressus* is a low shrub with short leaves; *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. *maki* has erect branches, columnar form, 1.5 to 3-inch-long leaves.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings. Hardwood cuttings root easily. Cutting propagation would ensure more uniform trees than seedlings. Nursery operators should be encouraged to grow Podocarpus in the single-trunked tree form for planting in urban landscapes.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Occasionally bothered by scale, mites, and sooty mold but not seriously. Some magnesium-deficiency on sandy soil, which is easily corrected with magnesium sulfate.