

# *Pongamia pinnata* Pongam<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Pongam is a fast-growing evergreen tree which reaches 40 feet in height and spread, forming a broad, spreading canopy casting moderate shade (Fig. 1). The three-inch-long, pinnately compound, glossy green leaves are briefly deciduous, dropping for just a short period of time in early spring but being quickly replaced by new growth. In spring, Pongam is at its finest when the showy, hanging clusters of white, pink, or lavender, pea-like, fragrant blossoms appear, the clusters up to 10 inches long. These beautiful blossoms and the glossy, nearly-evergreen leaves help make Pongam a favorite for use as a specimen, shade, or windbreak. It has also been planted as a street tree, but dropping pods often litter the ground. However, the seeds which are contained within the oval, 1.5-inch-long, brown seedpods are poisonous, a fact which should be considered in placing the tree in the landscape, if many children are present.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Pongamia pinnata*

**Pronunciation:** pawn-GAM-ee-uh pih-NAY-tuh

**Common name(s):** Pongam, Karum Tree, Poonga-Oil Tree

**Family:** *Leguminosae*

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

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** 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

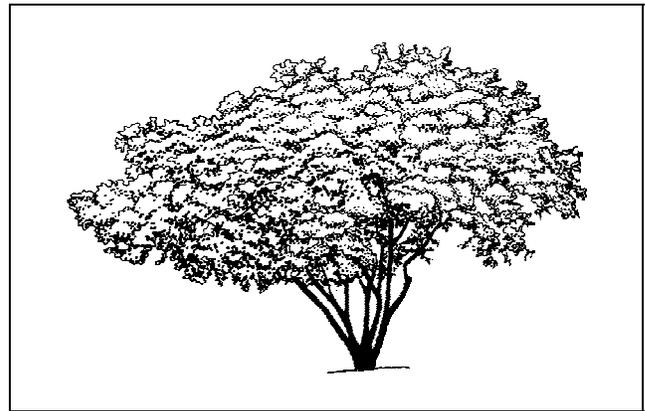


Figure 1. Middle-aged Pongam.

for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

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

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 35 to 40 feet

**Spread:** 30 to 40 feet

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

**Crown shape:** round

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound

**Leaflet margin:** entire

**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval)

**Leaflet venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaflet 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:** lavender; pink; white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated; pod

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** 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:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

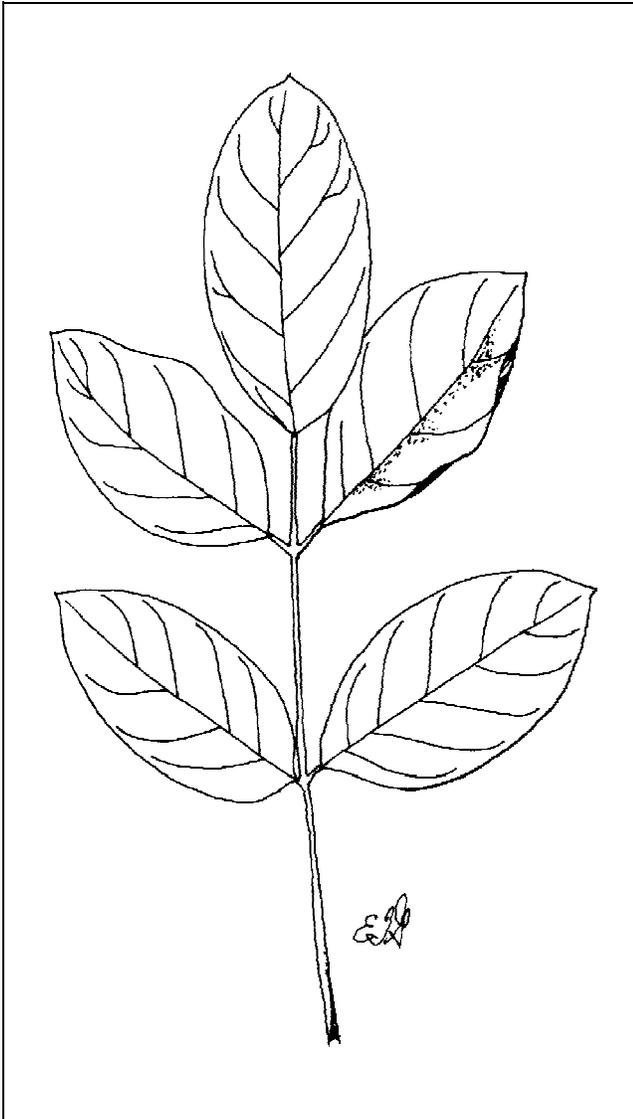


Figure 3. Foliage of Pongam.

Space major limbs along the trunk to increase the structural strength of the tree. Keep limbs less than two-thirds the diameter of the trunk to help ensure that branches are well secured to the tree.

Propagation is by seed.

### Pests

No pests are of major concern, but caterpillars occasionally cause some defoliation.

### Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

### 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

Pongam should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil. A relatively low-maintenance tree once established, Pongam is resistant to high winds and drought but is susceptible to freezing temperatures below 30-degrees F. Pongam will show nutritional deficiencies if grown on soil with a pH above 7.5.