



Coccoloba diversifolia Pigeon-Plum¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This upright, densely-foliated, rounded evergreen tree is usually seen at 15 to 25 feet and a spread of 20 to 35 feet, though it can grow larger (Fig. 1). Young trees appear pyramidal until the multiple trunks begin spreading. This can form a rounded vase on older specimens. It is a wonderful small to medium-sized tree for subtropical landscapes, typically sporting a multiple trunk. Trunks often grow almost parallel to each other, and embedded or included bark forms regularly, but this does not appear to compromise the wood strength of Pigeon-Plum. The four-inch-long, shiny, dark green, leathery leaves drop uniformly in March but quickly emerge as bright red new growth. The small, whitish-green flowers are abundantly produced on two to three-inch-long racemes in early summer, followed by 1/3-inch-long, purple, pear-shaped fruit. The single-seeded, somewhat edible fruits ripen in late fall and winter and are very attractive to birds.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Coccoloba diversifolia*

Pronunciation: koe-koe-LOE-buh
dye-ver-sih-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): Pigeon-Plum

Family: *Polygonaceae*

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

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around

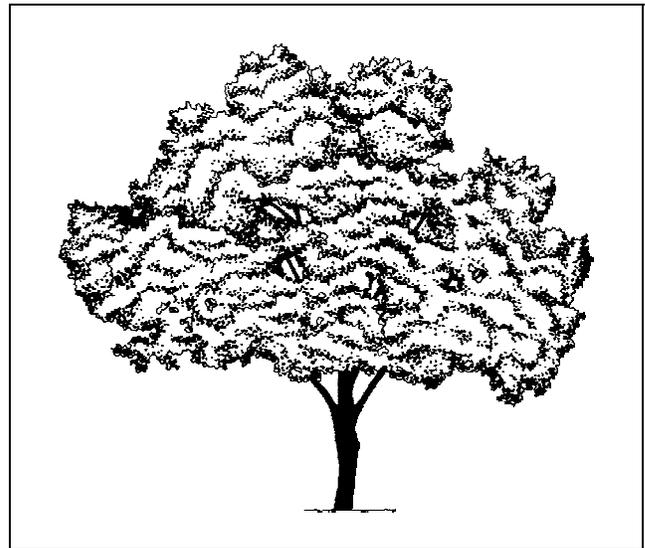


Figure 1. Middle-aged Pigeon-Plum.

parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; 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

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 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

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown shape: round; upright; vase shape

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong; ovate

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; very showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium; thick

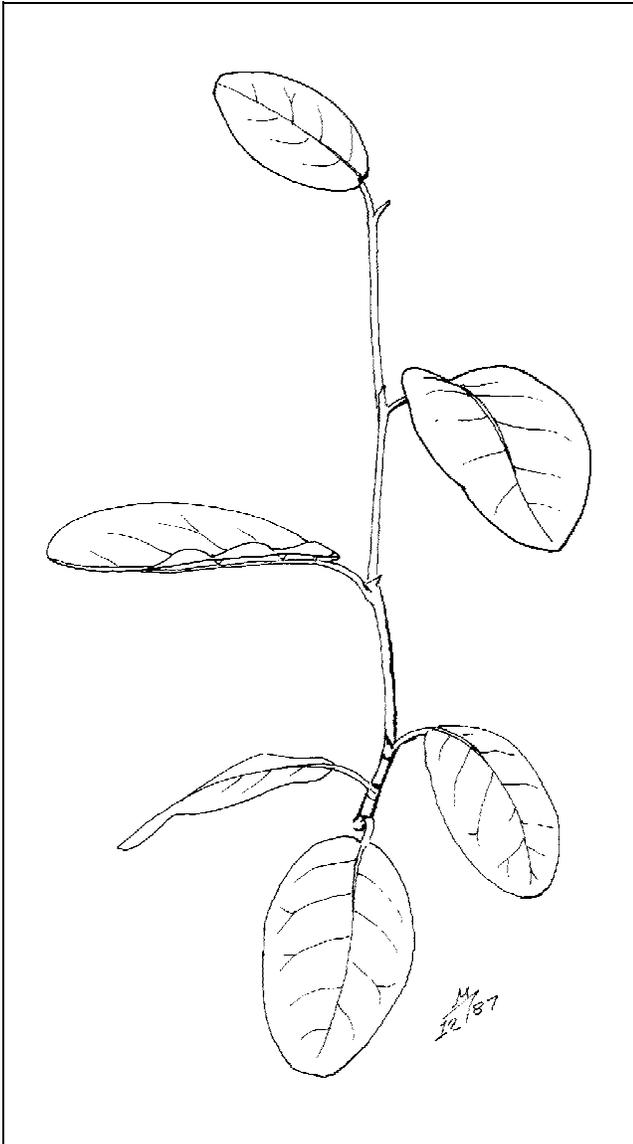


Figure 3. Foliage of Pigeon-Plum.

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: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

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

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Although Pigeon-Plum makes a wonderful shade tree, the fallen fruit may create a litter problem on patios and sidewalks, and along streets. But the two-month inconvenience of messy fruit may be a small price to pay for the wonderful effect this striking tree creates along streets or in a residential yard. Lower branches will need to be removed over time for vehicle clearance along streets, but there is a definite place for the tree along boulevards where cars will not park. The one to two-foot-wide, straight, upright trunks have grayish-brown bark that falls off in plates to reveal dark purplish bark beneath, helping to make Pigeon-Plum a wonderful specimen tree. It looks striking as a specimen lighted at night from beneath the canopy. Trees trained to a single trunk in the nursery can be very useful for planting along streets where vehicle clearance is needed.

Fast-growing in full sun or partial shade, Pigeon-Plum does best on moist, well-drained soils. It has good salt tolerance. Be sure to slice and otherwise drastically disturb and pull apart the root ball on pot bound, container-grown trees. Pot-bound trees have a reputation for rooting out poorly into landscape soil.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Chewing insects will occasionally riddle the new growth, but control is not usually required.