



## *Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus* Silver Buttonwood<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

This low-branching, multi-trunked, shrubby, evergreen tree has beautiful silvery leaves due to silky hairs which cover the leaf surface (Fig. 1). The inconspicuous, small, greenish flowers appear in dense conelike heads in terminal panicles in spring and are followed by 1/2-inch, conelike, red-brown fruits. The dark brown attractive bark is ridged and scaly. The leaves are small and fall between the grass blades of the lawn or are easily washed away in the rain.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus*

**Pronunciation:** kawn-oh-KAR-pus ee-RECK-tus  
variety suh-RISS-ee-us

**Common name(s):** Silver Buttonwood

**Family:** *Combretaceae*

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

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; hedge; 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; shade tree; small 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 common

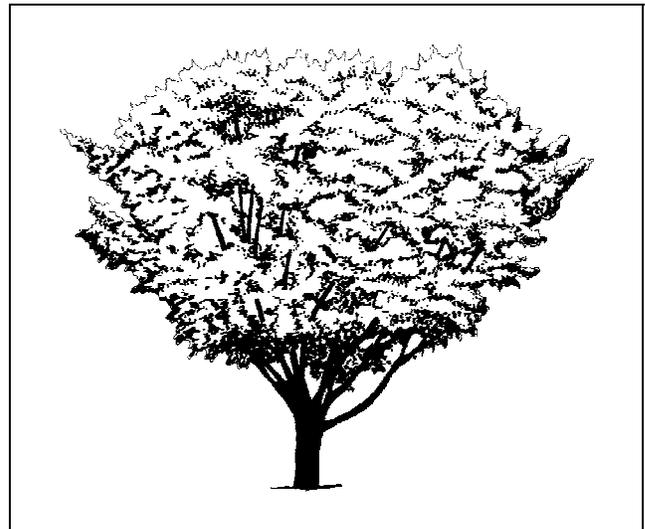


Figure 1. Mature Silver Buttonwood.

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

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 15 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 20 feet

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

**Crown shape:** spreading; vase shape

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** fine

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-180, 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 (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** lanceolate; oblong

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** blue or blue-green; silver

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** purple; white

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; year round flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval

**Fruit length:** < .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown; red

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; 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; showy trunk; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green; gray

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

### Culture

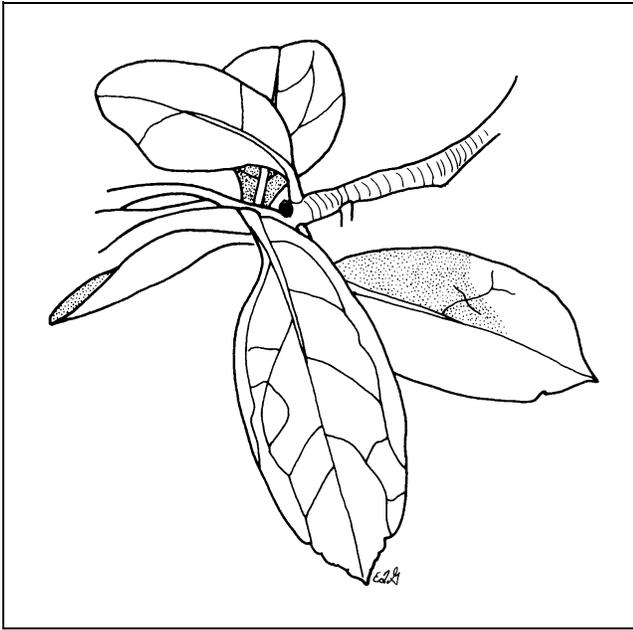
**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerance:** good



**Figure 3.** Foliage of Silver Buttonwood.

**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:** no pests are normally seen on the tree

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Capable of reaching a height of 40 feet with a 20-foot spread, Silver Buttonwood is often seen as a small, somewhat asymmetrical shrub but is ideal for use as a screen, clipped hedge, or specimen planting. Due to the attractive bark and soft foliage, a multistemmed specimen can make a nice patio or street tree. Planted in the open as a tree, Silver Buttonwood will grow to about 15 to 20 feet tall and will often take on a picturesque, contorted appearance when exposed to constant seashore winds, creating an attractive specimen. The crown is more symmetrical 1/2 mile or more from the coast or on the inland side of a tall ocean-front building. The wood of Silver Buttonwood was formerly used for firewood, cabinetwork, and charcoal making and is very strong. It is an ideal wood for smoking meats and fish.

A Florida native, Silver Buttonwood is ideal for seaside plantings as it is highly tolerant of full sun, sandy soils, and salty conditions. It also tolerates brackish areas and alkaline soils, thriving in the broken

shade and wet soils of hammocks. This is a tough tree! It withstands the rigors of urban conditions very well and makes a durable street or parking lot tree. Due to its small size, plant on 15-foot centers to form a closed canopy along a street. Purchase single-trunked trees for street and parking lot plantings.

The cultivar ‘Mombo’ has a dense crown and may be smaller than the species, 15 to 20 feet tall. *Conocarpus erectus* (Buttonwood) has green leaves and is a somewhat larger tree with a vase-like shape.

Propagation of Silver Buttonwood is by seed.

**Pests**

Sucking insect secretions will result in problems with sooty mold on trees inland from the coast.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.