



Ptelea trifoliata Common Hoptree¹

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INTRODUCTION

This deciduous North American native tree reaches about 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 are shiny and dark green on top, pale and hairy below, 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*
Pronunciation: TEE-lee-uh try-fole-ee-AY-tuh
Common name(s): Common Hoptree, 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

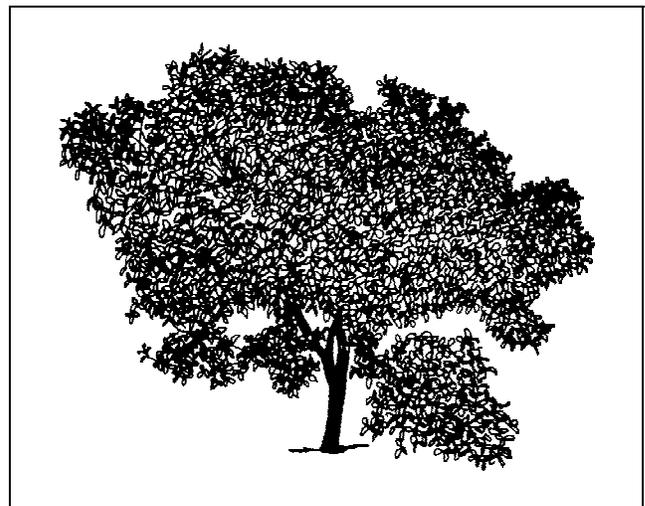


Figure 1. Middle-aged Common Hoptree.

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); obovate; ovate
Leaflet venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-530, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

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

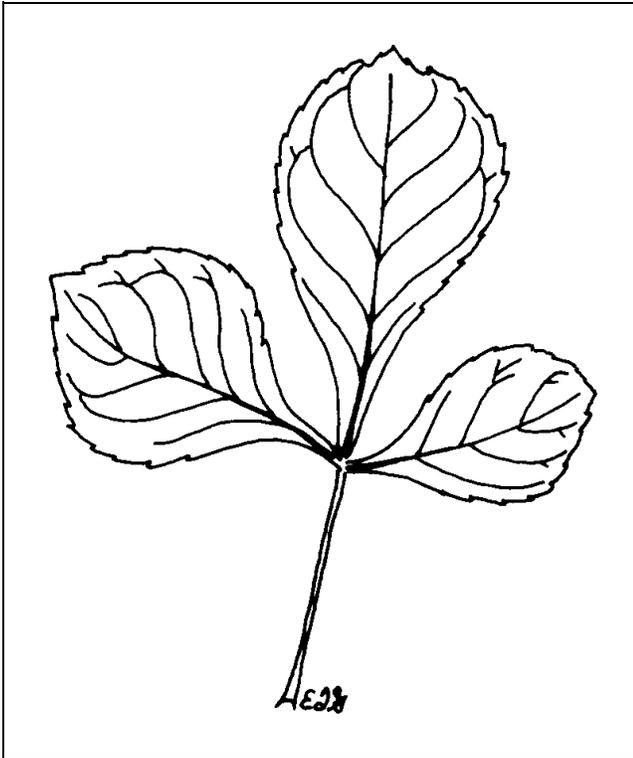


Figure 3. Foliage of Common Hoptree.

Cultivars include: 'Aurea', new leaves bright yellow fading to pale green; and 'Glauc', 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. Tree hoppers can discolor the foliage and cause premature defoliation.

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 unirrigated 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. It transplants readily from the field.