

## *Ptelea trifoliata* Common Hoptree<sup>1</sup>

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

### 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

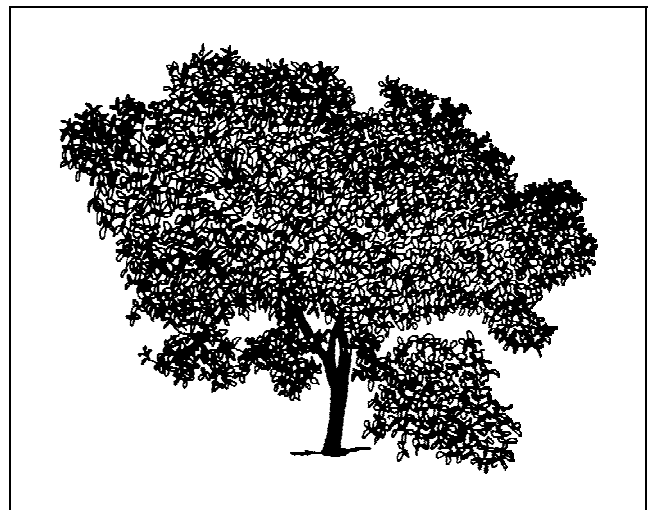


Figure 1. Middle-aged Common Hoptree.

### 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

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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

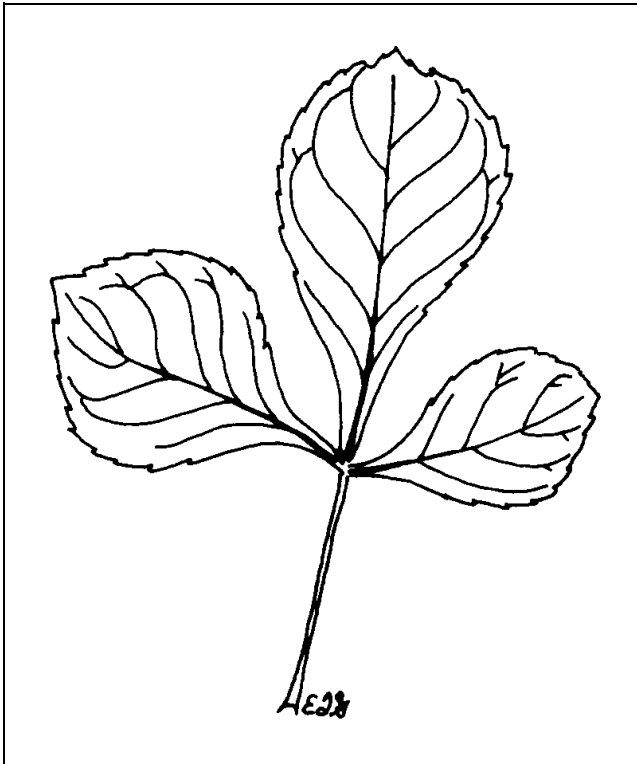


Figure 3. Foliage of Common Hoptree.

### 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.

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.