

Peltophorum pterocarpum Yellow Poinciana¹

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INTRODUCTION

This upright, handsome, spreading, semievergreen tree has a rounded canopy and is capable of reaching 50 feet in height with a 35 to 50-foot spread (Fig. 1). Form can be quite variable from tree to tree, unfortunately, eliminating this plant from the palette of many architects. With proper training and pruning in the nursery and in the landscape, a more uniform crown will develop. The dark green, delicate, feathery leaflets provide a softening effect for the tree's large size and create a welcoming, dappled shade. From May through September, the entire tree's canopy is smothered with a yellow blanket of flowers, appearing in showy, terminal panicles and exuding a delicious, grape-like perfume. These flower clusters are followed by four-inch-long seed pods which ripen to a brilliant, dark, wine-red.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Peltophorum pterocarpum*

Pronunciation: pell-TOFF-oh-rum teer-oh-KAR-pum

Common name(s): Yellow Poinciana

Family: *Leguminosae*

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

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

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



Figure 1. Middle-aged Yellow Poinciana.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 30 to 40 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; spreading; vase shape

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: bipinnately compound; even pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire

Leaflet shape: oblong

Leaflet venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: semievergreen

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaflet blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: purple; red

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

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; 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: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium; thick

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: low

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

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

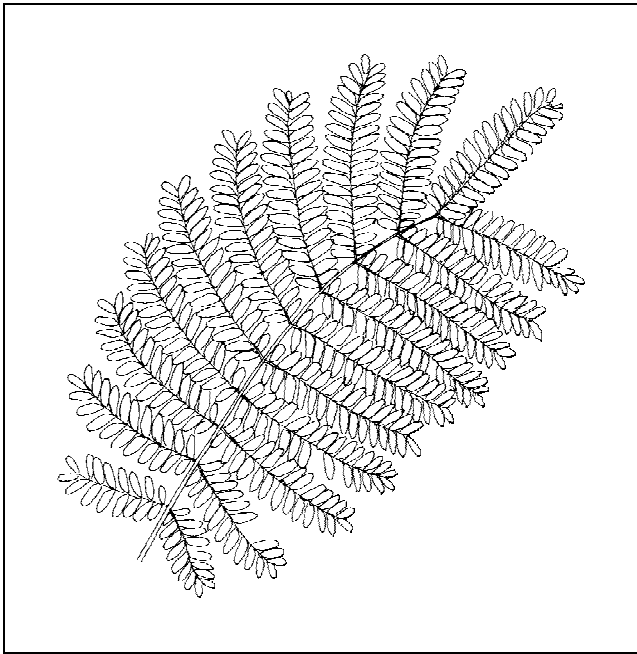


Figure 3. Foliage of Yellow Poinciana.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Yellow Poinciana is a wonderful shade or specimen tree for a large landscape, especially when in full bloom, and it can make a street tree as long as it receives regular pruning to control its weedy, somewhat unkempt habit. Its large size makes it a natural for the wide open spaces of large lawns or city parks.

Trees can be grown with a single or multiple trunk. Trunks or branches of multi-trunked trees should be well-spaced along a central stem and not allowed to grow larger than half the diameter of the main stem. This will increase wind hardiness. Plant only single-trunked trees along streets and other public areas to ensure a durable plant.

A fast-growing tree, Yellow Poinciana grows best in full sun on any well-drained soil. Temperatures in the high 20's cause the leaves to drop but these are quickly replaced. Even though Yellow Poinciana will develop a very large trunk, its shallow, surface roots make it susceptible to being blown over during a hurricane's severe windstorms. Locate the tree about ten feet from sidewalks or pavement so the large surface roots don't cause damage.

Peltophorum inerme is grown in the southern part of Florida (USDA hardiness zone 10b) and in the tropical areas, and is not as hardy. *Peltophorum dubium* is cold hardy to Orlando (USDA hardiness zone 9b).

Propagation is by cuttings or seed. Seeds must be scarified and seedlings will bloom in four to five years.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.