

Coccoloba uvifera: Seagrape¹

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Introduction

Reaching a height of 35 to 50 feet, seagrape can take on a variety of shapes, depending upon its location but typically forms a multi-stemmed vase shape if left unpruned. The large, almost circular, broad, leathery, evergreen leaves of seagrape have distinctive red veins. The leaves frequently turn completely red before they fall in winter. The new young foliage is a beautiful bronze color which is set off nicely against the dark green, shiny leaves. The inconspicuous ivory flowers are produced on foot-long racemes and are followed by dense clusters of 3/4-inch diameter green grapes on female trees only, ripening to a luscious deep purple in late summer. Males do not produce fruit. The grapes are often used to make a delicious jelly and are also popular with birds and squirrels.

General Information

Scientific name: *Coccoloba uvifera*

Pronunciation: koe-koe-LOE-buh yoo-VIFF-er-uh

Common name(s): Seagrape

Family: *Polygonaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Florida, Central America, northwest portion of South America and the Caribbean

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: street without sidewalk; screen; specimen; shade; hedge; reclamation; fruit; tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; bonsai.

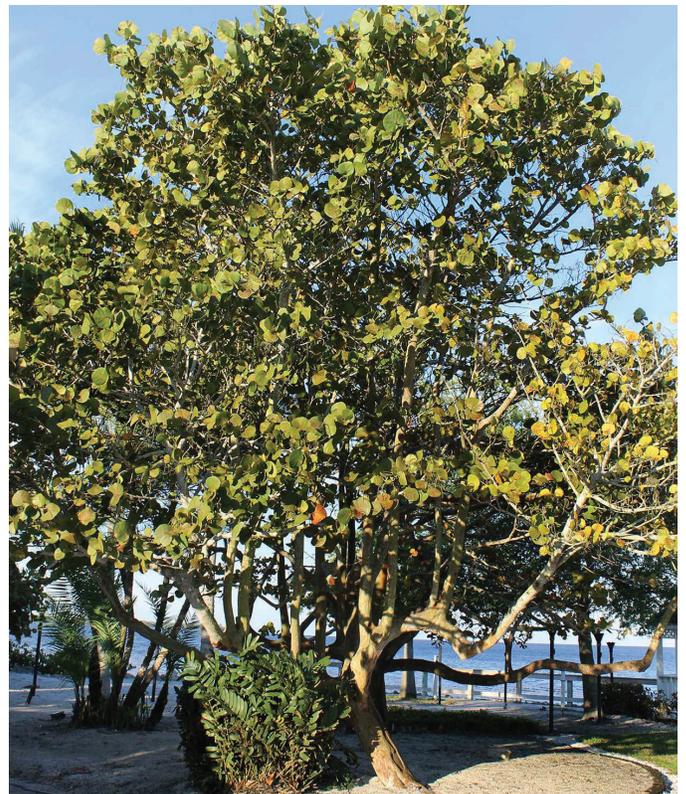


Figure 1. Full Form—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 35 to 50 feet
Spread: 20 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: vase
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: orbiculate
Leaf venation: reticulate, brachidodrome, pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green with red veins
Fall color: red
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: cream-colored
Flower characteristics: not showy; emerge in clusters on racemes
Flowering: primarily spring to early summer, but may also occur year-round

Fruit

Fruit shape: elliptical
Fruit length: $\frac{3}{4}$ inch
Fruit covering: fleshy achene
Fruit color: green to reddish purple
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem
Fruiting: emerges in early summer and ripens by early fall



Figure 3. Young Leaf—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape



Figure 4. Mature Leaf—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Bark: smooth and mottled with whitish, gray, and brown, thin-peeling plates
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thick
Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Flower—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape



Figure 6. Fruit—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high



Figure 7. Bark—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

Credits: Gritta Hasing

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The contorted, twisting trunk (which can grow to two feet in diameter) and upright branching habit makes seagrape an interesting, picturesque shade tree or specimen planting or, it can be pruned into a dense hedge, screen, or windbreak. Because of its size and coarse texture, seagrape as a clipped hedge is more suited to foundation plantings for large buildings where it will lend a tropical effect. It is also used as a seaside hedge in commercial landscapes, but requires hand pruning, since the large leaves do not lend themselves well to shearing.

Pruning is required two or three times during the first 10 years after planting to train the multiple trunks so they are well-attached to the tree. Be sure branches do not develop embedded bark, since they will be poorly attached to the trunk and could split from the trunk. But the wood and the tree is generally very strong and durable following this developmental and corrective pruning. The tree will then

perform well with little care, except for occasional pruning of lower branches to create clearance for vehicles. Some people object to the litter created by the large, slowly-decomposing leaves which fall from the tree during the year.

Requiring full sun and sandy, well-drained soils, seagrape is excellent for seaside locations since it is highly salt- and drought-tolerant. Plants should be well-watered until established and then should only require occasional pruning to control shape.

There is a variegated cultivar available.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests

Stems are subject to seagrape borer which can kill branches.

A nipple gall causes raised, red nipples on the upper leaf surface.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

References

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