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Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Kalopanax pictus: Castor-Aralia[1]

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Introduction

With massive, spreading branches and large, 7- to 12-inch-diameter, dark green, multi-lobed leaves, Castor-Aralia provides dense shade below its canopy and makes an ideal shade tree. Growing 40 to 50 feet high with an equal spread, Castor-Aralia is deciduous, the leaves turning a faint red in fall before dropping. While the young stems are armed with short, yellow prickles, the mature trunk is attractively ridged and blackened. The 1-inch-diameter, white flowers appear in dense, 12- to 24-inch-long terminal panicles and attract quite a few bees. This is not a problem on larger specimens since flowers are borne up in the tree away from the ground. The small black fruit which ripens in early fall is eagerly consumed by birds.

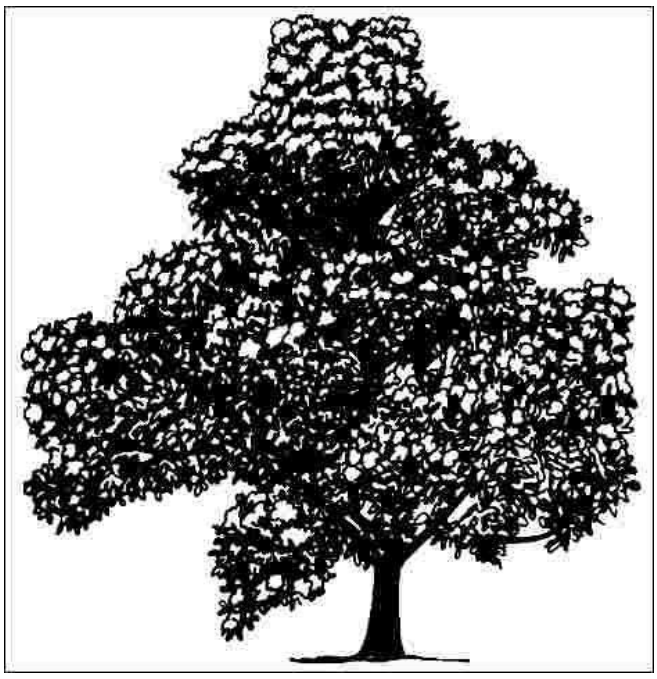

Figure 1. Mature *Kalopanax pictus*: Castor-Aralia

General Information

Scientific name: *Kalopanax pictus*

Pronunciation: kal-oh-PAN-acks PICK-tus

Common name(s): Castor-Aralia, prickly castor-oil tree

Family: *Araliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5A through 7B (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: invasive non-native

Uses: tree lawn > 6 ft wide; specimen; shade

Availability: not native to North America

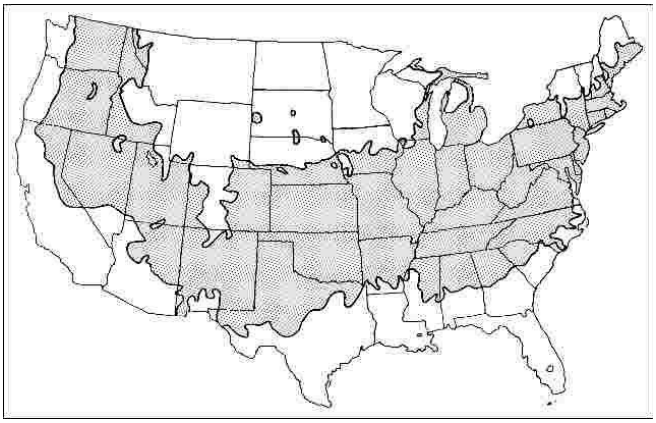

Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 40 to 60 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed

Leaf shape: star-shaped

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow, red

Fall characteristic: not showy

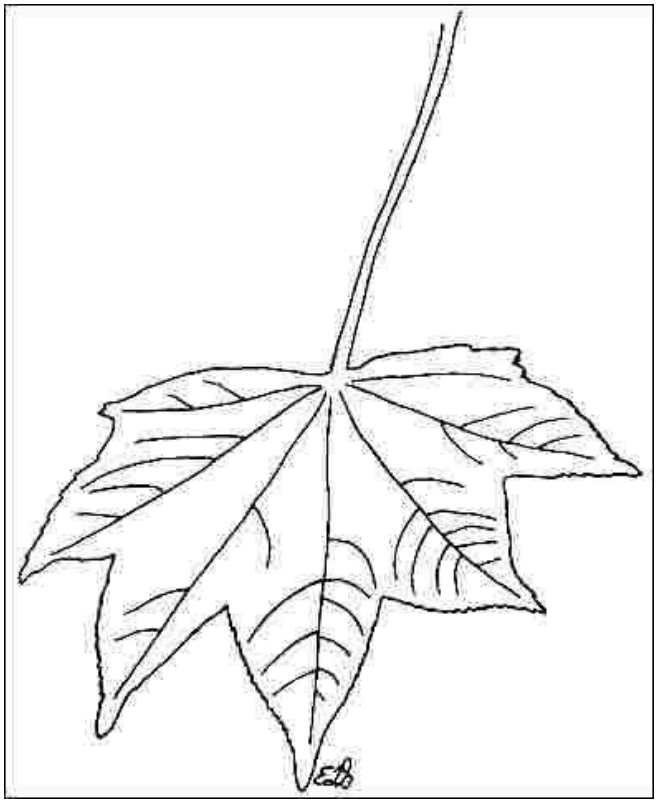

Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: black

Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels/mammals; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: very thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

Use and Management

This tree could be planted more often in landscapes, but seeds germinate readily in the landscape. Use it with caution near open fields and wetlands. The large size and coarse texture probably make it best suited for large-scale landscapes, such as golf courses, parks, business complexes and campuses, but it could be tried along streets where there is plenty of soil space for root expansion.

Castor-Aralia should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil and will tolerate alkaline soil. While drought-tolerant

once established, Castor-Aralia should receive ample moisture until then. Any pruning should be done in late spring, and Castor-Aralia is considered a long-lived tree.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

[1] This document is ENH-494, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture Department. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed March 2014. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication. © UF/IFAS. This publication is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/.*

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