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Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Leucaena retusa: Goldenball Leadtree[1]

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Introduction

Goldenball Leadtree is a native North American evergreen tree which reaches 25 feet in height and has blue/green to bright green foliage. The showy, yellow to white, rounded blooms appear from April to October and are especially prominent after a heavy rain. The attractive fruits which follow ripen in late summer.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Leucaena retusa*: Goldenball Leadtree
Credit: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Leucaena retusa*

Pronunciation: loo-KAY-nuh ree-TOO-suh

Common name(s): Goldenball Leadtree, Littleleaf Leucaena, Littleleaf Leadtree

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7A through 9B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: weedy native

Uses: deck or patio; specimen; highway median; Bonsai

Availability: not native to North America

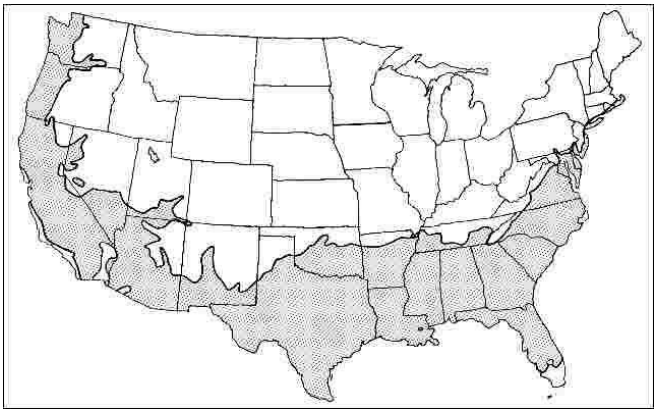

Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 20 to 25 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: vase, upright/erect

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: bipinnately compound

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like, elongated

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches, 3 to 6 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

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: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: unknown

Use and Management

The crown can develop a one-sided or asymmetrical habit when it is young, so pruning and training may be needed to form a more uniformly shaped crown. The drooping habit of the branches makes it difficult to maintain near a street, but it would make a nice accent tree for the shrub border or backyard garden. The tree tends to seed itself into the surrounding landscape and spreads rapidly. Some consider it a weed, and the wood is brittle.

Goldenball Leadtree should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil and will tolerate alkaline conditions very well. Care must be taken in the placement of this tree in the landscape since the wood is susceptible to breakage in wind- and ice-storms. Plant it in a spot protected from the wind.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

[1] This document is ENH-510, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 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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