

# *Sapindus saponaria*: Florida Soapberry<sup>1</sup>

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

## Introduction

Florida soapberry grows at a moderate rate to 30 to 40 feet tall. The pinnately compound, evergreen leaves are 12 inches long with each leaflet four inches long. 10-inch-long panicles of small, white flowers appear during fall, winter, and spring but these are fairly inconspicuous. The fleshy fruits which follow are less than an inch-long, shiny, and orange/brown. The seeds inside are poisonous, a fact which should be considered in the tree's placement in the landscape, especially if children will be present. The bark is rough and gray. The common name of Soapberry comes from the soap-like material which is made from the berries in tropical countries.



Figure 1. Mature *Sapindus saponaria*: Florida soapberry  
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Sapindus saponaria*

**Pronunciation:** SAP-in-dus sap-oh-NAIR-ee-uh

**Common name(s):** Florida soapberry, wingleaf soapberry

**Family:** *Sapindaceae*

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

**Origin:** native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; reclamation; street without sidewalk; shade; highway median

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



Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 30 to 40 feet

**Spread:** 25 to 35 feet

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**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical  
**Crown shape:** round  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound  
**Leaf margin:** undulate, sinuate/undulate  
**Leaf shape:** linear, lanceolate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate, brachidodrome  
**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen, evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

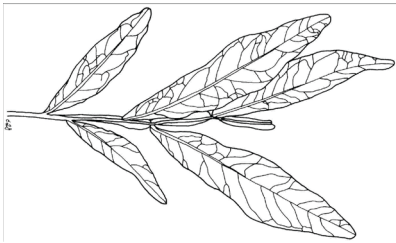


Figure 3. Foliage

## Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray  
**Flower characteristics:** not showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** orange, brown  
**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** gray, brown  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no  
**Outstanding tree:** yes  
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown  
**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

## Use and Management

Soapberry can be planted in low maintenance landscapes for the unusually prominent, orange-colored berries. They require little care other than some initial pruning to direct growth and to develop a strong branch structure. The bushy growth habit of this medium-sized tree combines nicely with shrubs and ground covers planted beneath and around the tree. Fruits attract the boxelder bug.

Florida Soapberry should be grown in full sun and will tolerate almost any soil. It is highly drought- and salt-tolerant.

Propagation is by seed.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.