

Bucida buceras: Black Olive¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

Introduction

Though commonly called ‘black olive tree’, this native of the upper Florida Keys (some consider it native, others do not) is not the edible olive we know and love, but does produce a small, black seed-capsule. Black olive is a 40 to 50-foot-tall evergreen tree with a smooth trunk holding up strong, wind-resistant branches, forming a pyramidal shape when young but developing a very dense, full, oval to rounded crown with age. Sometimes the top of the crown will flatten with age, and the tree grows horizontally. The lush, dark bluish-green, leathery leaves are two to four inches long and clustered at branch tips, sometimes mixed with the 0.5 to 1.5-inch-long spines found along the branches.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Bucida buceras*: Black Olive.

General Information

Scientific name: *Bucida buceras*

Pronunciation: bew-SYE-duh bew-SER-azz

Common name(s): Black Olive, Oxhorn Bucida

Family: *Combretaceae*

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

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: According to the IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida’s Natural Areas (IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group 2008), *Bucida buceras* should be treated with caution in the south zone in Florida, may be recommended but managed to prevent escape. It is not considered a problem species and may be recommended in the north and central zone in Florida (counties listed by zone at: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/assess_counties.pdf)

Uses: hedge; reclamation; street without sidewalk; shade; specimen; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; indoors

Availability: not native to North America

Description

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 35 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: oval, round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Figure 3)
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** obovate, oblanceolate
- Leaf venation:** brachidodrome, pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

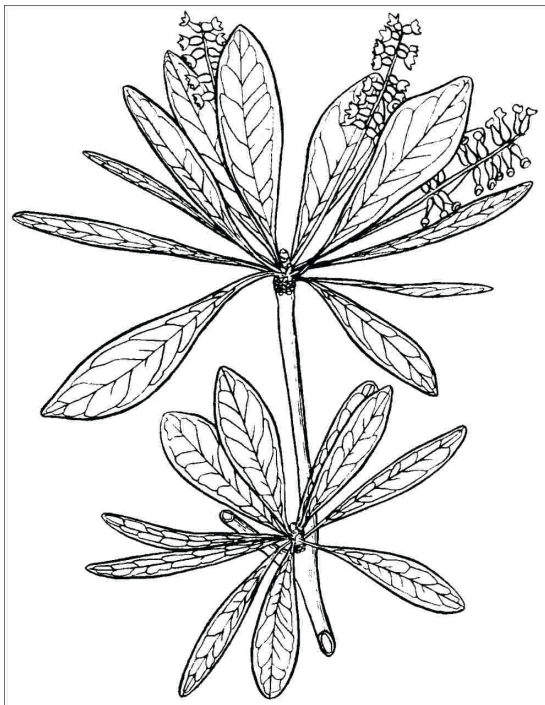


Figure 3. Foliage.

Flower

- Flower color:** yellow
- Flower characteristics:** not showy

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- Fruit covering:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** black
- 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; no thorns
- Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure
- Breakage:** resistant
- Current year twig color:** gray
- Current year twig thickness:** thin, medium
- Wood specific gravity:** unknown

Culture

- Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade
- Soil tolerances:** sand; loam; clay; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

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 inconspicuous, small, greenish-yellow flowers are produced in four-inch-long spikes during spring and summer and eventually form the black fruits which, unfortunately, exude a staining tannic acid material which could damage patios, sidewalks, or vehicles parked below. Besides this one drawback, black olive is beautifully suited as a street, shade, or specimen tree for frost-free areas, but is probably overplanted. There are many native trees which could be used in its place, including satin leaf, gumbo-limbo and others.

Black olive grows slowly and should be planted in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, moist soils. Plants may be slightly damaged at 32-degrees F. but are killed at 25-degrees F. Trees may show chlorosis on high pH soils.

Propagation is by seeds (with difficulty) or layering.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally bothered by sooty mold and bark borer. Eryphide mites cause galls but no control is needed.

Literature Cited

Fox, A.M., D.R. Gordon, J.A. Dusky, L. Tyson, and R.K. Stocker. 2008. IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas: Status Assessment. Cited from the Internet (November 16, 2012), http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/status_assessment.pdf