**Bucida buceras: Black Olive**

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**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.](image)

**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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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

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**