**Peltophorum pterocarpum: Yellow Poinciana**¹
Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**Introduction**

This upright, handsome, spreading, semievergreen tree has a rounded canopy and is capable of reaching 50 feet in height with a 35 to 50-foot spread. Form can be quite variable from tree to tree, unfortunately, eliminating this plant from the palette of many architects. With proper training and pruning in the nursery and in the landscape, a more uniform crown will develop. The dark green, delicate, feathery leaflets provide a softening effect for the tree's large size and create a welcoming, dappled shade. From May through September, the entire tree's canopy is smothered with a yellow blanket of flowers, appearing in showy, terminal panicles and exuding a delicious, grape-like perfume. These flower clusters are followed by four-inch-long seed pods which ripen to a brilliant, dark, wine-red.

**General Information**

Scientific name: *Peltophorum pterocarpum*

Pronunciation: pell-TOFF-oh-rum teer-oh-KAR-pum

Common name(s): Yellow Poinciana

Family: **Leguminosae**

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

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida’s Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

![Figure 1. Middle-aged *Peltophorum pterocarpum*: Yellow Poinciana](image)

Credits: Ed Gilman

![Figure 2. Range](image)

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Peltophorum pterocarpum: Yellow Poinciana

Uses: shade; specimen; reclamation; highway median
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**Description**

Height: 40 to 50 feet
Spread: 30 to 40 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: vase, round, spreading
Crown density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: bipinnately compound, even-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

**Flower**

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristics: very showy

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like, elongated
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: purple, red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

**Breakage**: susceptible to breakage
**Current year twig color**: brown
**Current year twig thickness**: medium, thick
**Wood specific gravity**: unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

**Other**

Roots: can form large surface roots
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**

Yellow Poinciana is a wonderful shade or specimen tree for a large landscape, especially when in full bloom, and it can make a street tree as long as it receives regular pruning to control its weedy, somewhat unkempt habit. Its large size makes it a natural for the wide open spaces of large lawns or city parks.

Trees can be grown with a single or multiple trunk. Trunks or branches of multi-trunked trees should be well-spaced along a central stem and not allowed to grow larger than half the diameter of the main stem. This will increase wind hardness. Plant only single-trunked trees along streets and other public areas to ensure a durable plant.

A fast-growing tree, Yellow Poinciana grows best in full sun on any well-drained soil. Temperatures in the high 20’s cause the leaves to drop but these are quickly replaced. Even though Yellow Poinciana will develop a very large trunk, its shallow, surface roots make it susceptible to being blown over during a hurricane’s severe windstorms. Locate the tree about ten feet from sidewalks or pavement so the large surface roots don’t cause damage.

*Peltophorum inerme* is grown in the southern part of Florida (USDA hardiness zone 10b) and in the tropical areas, and is not as hardy. *Peltophorum dubium* is cold hardy to Orlando (USDA hardiness zone 9b).

Propagation is by cuttings or seed. Seeds must be scarified and seedlings will bloom in four to five years.


**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

**Literature Cited**