**Pongamia pinnata: Pongam**

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**Introduction**

Pongam is a fast-growing evergreen tree which reaches 40 feet in height with a 55-foot spread, forming a broad, spreading canopy casting moderate shade. The six- to nine-inch-long, pinnately compound, shiny dark green leaves are briefly deciduous, dropping for just a short period of time in early spring but being quickly replaced by new growth. Pongam is at its finest in the spring when the showy, hanging clusters of white, pink, or lavender, pea-like, fragrant blossoms appear, the clusters up to 10 inches long. These beautiful blossoms and the glossy, nearly-evergreen leaves help make pongam a favorite for use as a specimen, shade, or windbreak. It has also been planted as a street tree, but dropping pods often litter the ground. However, the seeds which are contained within the oval, 1 ¼-2-inch-long, brown seedpods are poisonous, a fact which should be considered in placing the tree in the landscape, if many children are present.

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**General Information**

**Scientific name:** Millettia pinnata  
**Pronunciation:** mil-LET-ee-uh pih-NAY-tuh  
**Common name(s):** Pongam, Karum tree, Poonga-oil tree  
**Family:** Fabaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Figure 2)
**Origin:** native to southeast Asia, Australia, and the western Pacific Islands

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** invasive and not recommended except for “specified and limited” use approved by the UF/IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group (North, Central, South)

**Uses:** specimen; shade; deck or patio; highway median; street without sidewalk; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft

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**Description**

**Height:** 30 to 40 feet  
**Spread:** 30 to 55 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical  
**Crown shape:** round  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound; made up of 5-9 leaflets but most often 7  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 6 to 8 inches; leaflets are 3 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** dark green and shiny on top, paler green underneath  
**Fall color:** no color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

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**Flower**

**Flower color:** white, pink, or lavender  
**Flower characteristics:** somewhat fragrant; pea-like; emerges in clusters on 5-10” long, lateral and terminal racemes  
**Flowering:** spring to summer

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**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval to flat pod, with a curved and pointed tip  
**Fruit length:** 1 ¼ to 2 inches  
**Fruit covering:** dry or hard  
**Fruit color:** yellow to brown  
**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem; indehiscent  
**Fruiting:** fall to spring

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**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns  
**Bark:** gray to brown and smooth or slightly roughened  
**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown
Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: moderate to high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate to 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

Pongam should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil. A relatively low-maintenance tree once established, pongam is resistant to high winds and drought but is susceptible to freezing temperatures below 30-degrees F. Pongam will show nutritional deficiencies if grown on soil with a pH above 7.5.

Space major limbs along the trunk to increase the structural strength of the tree. Keep limbs less than two-thirds the diameter of the trunk to help ensure that branches are well secured to the tree.

Propagation is by seed.
**Pests**
No pests are of major concern, but caterpillars occasionally cause some defoliation.

**Diseases**
No diseases are of major concern.

**Additional References**