

# *Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Reaching a height of 35 to 50 feet, seagrape can take on a variety of shapes, depending upon its location but typically forms a multi-stemmed vase shape if left unpruned. The large, almost circular, broad, leathery, evergreen leaves of seagrape have distinctive red veins. The leaves frequently turn completely red before they fall in winter. The new young foliage is a beautiful bronze color which is set off nicely against the dark green, shiny leaves. The inconspicuous ivory flowers are produced on foot-long racemes and are followed by dense clusters of 3/4-inch diameter green grapes on female trees only, ripening to a luscious deep purple in late summer. Males do not produce fruit. The grapes are often used to make a delicious jelly and are also popular with birds and squirrels.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Coccoloba uvifera*

**Pronunciation:** koe-koe-LOE-buh yoo-VIFF-er-uh

**Common name(s):** Seagrape

**Family:** *Polygonaceae*

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

**Origin:** native to Florida, Central America, northwest portion of South America and the Caribbean

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** native

**Uses:** street without sidewalk; screen; specimen; shade; hedge; reclamation; fruit; tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; bonsai.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

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Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 35 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 20 to 30 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** vase

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** orbiculate

**Leaf venation:** reticulate, brachidodrome, pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches

**Leaf color:** green with red veins

**Fall color:** red

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** cream-colored

**Flower characteristics:** not showy; emerge in clusters on racemes

**Flowering:** primarily spring to early summer, but may also occur year-round

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elliptical

**Fruit length:**  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy achene

**Fruit color:** green to reddish purple

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

**Fruiting:** emerges in early summer and ripens by early fall



Figure 3. Young Leaf—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape



Figure 4. Mature Leaf—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

**Bark:** smooth and mottled with whitish, gray, and brown, thin-peeling plates

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown





Figure 5. Flower—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape



Figure 6. Fruit—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun, or partial shade

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high



Figure 7. Bark—*Coccoloba uvifera*: Seagrape

Credits: Gritta Hasing

## 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 contorted, twisting trunk (which can grow to two feet in diameter) and upright branching habit makes seagrape an interesting, picturesque shade tree or specimen planting or, it can be pruned into a dense hedge, screen, or windbreak. Because of its size and coarse texture, seagrape as a clipped hedge is more suited to foundation plantings for large buildings where it will lend a tropical effect. It is also used as a seaside hedge in commercial landscapes, but requires hand pruning, since the large leaves do not lend themselves well to shearing.

Pruning is required two or three times during the first 10 years after planting to train the multiple trunks so they are well-attached to the tree. Be sure branches do not develop embedded bark, since they will be poorly attached to the trunk and could split from the trunk. But the wood and the tree is generally very strong and durable following this developmental and corrective pruning. The tree will then

perform well with little care, except for occasional pruning of lower branches to create clearance for vehicles. Some people object to the litter created by the large, slowly-decomposing leaves which fall from the tree during the year.

Requiring full sun and sandy, well-drained soils, seagrape is excellent for seaside locations since it is highly salt- and drought-tolerant. Plants should be well-watered until established and then should only require occasional pruning to control shape.

There is a variegated cultivar available.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

## Pests

Stems are subject to seagrape borer which can kill branches.

A nipple gall causes raised, red nipples on the upper leaf surface.

## Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

## References

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