

Lysiloma latisiliquum: False Tamarind¹

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean²

Introduction

False tamarind is native to South Florida and grows moderately fast, up to 30 to 60 feet tall and 50 feet wide, its slender, short trunk topped with long, somewhat arching branches forming an umbrella-like silhouette. The dark green, pinnately compound, fern-like leaves are a showy red when young and make a striking contrast, the new and older growth appearing together. Developing into a more open tree with age, false tamarind makes an ideal shade, park, or seaside planting.

General Information

Scientific name: *Lysiloma latisiliquum*

Pronunciation: lye-sih-LOE-muh lah-ta-suh-LE E-qum

Common name(s): false tamarind, wild-tamarind, Bahama lysiloma

Family: *Fabaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 6)

Origin: native to Florida, the West Indies, southern Mexico, and Central America

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: reclamation; street without sidewalk; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; shade; highway median; specimen; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; container or planter



Figure 1. Full Form - *Lysiloma latisiliquum*: false tamarind
Credits: UF/IFAS

1. This document is ENH-525, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 60 feet

Spread: 30 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: vase, weeping

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: bipinnately compound; primary leaflets are in pairs of 3 to 5 and made up of 10 to 20 pairs of secondary leaflets

Leaf margin: entire



Figure 3. Leaf - *Lysiloma latisiliquum*: false tamarind
Credits: UF/IFAS

Leaf shape: obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; secondary leaflets are ½ inch

Leaf color: dark green on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: not showy; mildly fragrant; emerges in dense clusters on ½-¾ wide globular heads; each head is attached to a 1 ½" long stalk and emerges from leaf axils in groups of 3

Flowering: spring to summer



Figure 4. Flower - *Lysiloma latisiliquum*: false tamarind
Credits: UF/IFAS

Fruit

Fruit shape: flat, often somewhat twisted pod

Fruit length: 3 to 8 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: turns from green to brown with maturity and then flakes off to reveal tan

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem



Figure 5. Fruit - *Lysiloma latisiliquum*: false tamarind
Credits: UF/IFAS

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: light gray to whitish and smooth, becoming light to dark brown and breaking into plate-like scales with age

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thin, medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases



Figure 6. Bark - *Lysiloma latisiliquum*: false tamarind
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

Use and Management

Cities have planted false tamarind along streets with good success. They are probably well suited for this use. Codominant stems form very low on the trunk without proper pruning and training, and branches will droop toward the ground. Specify trees for planting along streets and in parking lots that have a clear trunk to about five feet or more to help avoid this problem. If large branches are allowed to develop below this point, the tree could become disfigured as these branches have to be removed in the future to allow for passage of vehicles and pedestrians. Locate the first permanent branch 6 (preferably 10) or more feet from the ground to allow for clearance. Low branches can be left on the tree if it will be planted in a yard, park or other location where vehicle clearance is not a concern.

Major branches often develop embedded or included bark as they grow at the same rate as the trunk. They often grow to about the same size as the trunk. This does not appear to be a problem on small trees but could encourage branch breakage as the tree grows older. Try to keep the major branches from growing larger than about two-thirds the diameter of the trunk.

The small, white flowers appear in late spring as fuzzy globes and are followed by four to six-inch-long, thin, flattened, red/brown seedpods which disperse their brown seeds in fall.

False tamarind should be grown in full sun or partial shade on rich, well-drained soil and is sensitive to freezing weather. The tree is also highly drought- and salt-tolerant making it ideal for use in seaside landscapes.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Stem galls.

Diseases

Rust diseases.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.