

'Shady Lady' Black Olive (*Bucida buceras*)



Unpruned young tree is obliquely pyramidal



Maturing tree with lower branches removed



Mature trees in flower in early May

Common Names: 'Shady Lady' black olive
Family: Combretaceae
Origin: Central America; Caribbean
Growth Rate: Medium
Cold Tolerance: 9B, 25°F minimum
Typical Height: 45 feet
Drought Tolerance: High
Salt Tolerance: High
Soil Requirement: Wide
Light Requirement: High
Plant Type: Evergreen tree
Foliage Color: Green
Flowering Season: Spring
Major Problems: None
Environmental Problems: None

Origin

The species, *Bucida buceras*, is native to Central America and the Caribbean. It has been recorded in error as native to Florida. Though commonly called "black olive" it is not related to the edible olive. Oxhorn bucida is another of its common name.

"Black Olive" and 'Shady Lady'

In south Florida, two distinct types of black olives are commonly observed. The unimproved variety is the old landscape selection and retains the common name of black olive. 'Shady Lady' is the cultivar du jour. It has a thicker, denser canopy than its predecessor. Its leaves are smaller and

usually darker green. The bark is often a darker hue than the older selection. 'Shady Lady' is slower growing than the unimproved variety, but can attain equivalent height over time.

Bark, Leaves and Twigs of the 'Shady Lady'

The bark of most trees becomes increasingly fissured and thickened with age. It is often punctured with small holes. The Yellow Belly Sapsucker is a migratory woodpecker that drill holes along and around the length of the trunk and large branches. It feeds on the sap emerging from the holes. This causes no harm to the tree.

The leathery leaves are short stalked and typically spatulate. They are wider at their tips, tapered at their base, often widest beyond the middle. The largest leaves are about 1.25 inches long and 1 inch wide. The apex is entire or notched. They are alternate but are tightly clustered along the length of zigzag (divaricate) twigs. A single or pair of spines can sometimes be found along the length of the stem where the leaves congregated, or where the leaves have fallen to leave leaf scars. Spines are approximately 0.25 inches long but many are usually not hardened sufficiently to cause harm. Because the leaves of the old landscape variety and the 'Shady Lady' are so varied, it is advisable that before large landscape installations, the trees be double checked to ensure correct identification.



Small holes caused by the Yellow Belly Sapsucker



Leaves are in clusters along the length of the zigzag stem



New light-green growth flush contrasts against dark green older leaves



Leaf of unimproved variety on the left and the 'Shady Lady' on the right

Growth

Flushing growth of the shoots begins in February through April after a period of rest. New leaves are light green and are striking against the dark green background of the older leaves. There may be several irregular flushes throughout the summer. Branching produces nearly horizontal shoots. It is obliquely pyramidal in its youth developing a very dense, full, oval to rounded crown with age. Sometimes the top of the crown will flatten with age, and the tree will grow horizontally. Typical mature height is between 40 to 50-feet-tall.

Flowering, Fruiting and Propagation

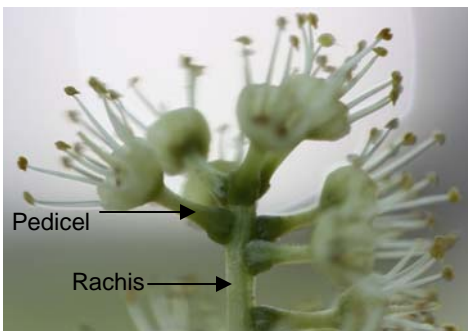
Individual trees flower for several weeks sometime in mid-fall to early summer on branches of the newest leaves. Flowering and fruiting may be irregular through this period. Although the yellowish flowers are minute, they are so abundant on the tree that they are quite showy. The inflorescence are clusters of unbranched spikes among the leaves. Individual flowers have no petals but a short 5-lobed calyx cup. The drupes (fruits) are irregularly 5-angled, slightly fleshy or dry containing one seed. Propagation of the species from seed is challenging. In any case, all 'Shady Lady' trees are propagated vegetatively from cuttings. Trees may not come true to type if grown from seeds.



The characteristic zigzag stem



A pair of small spines located by the leaf scar



Close up of the petal-less flowers attached to the rachis of the spike



The inflorescence are spikes among the leaves

Pests

No pest or disease is sufficiently common or damaging to be of major concern to the health of the tree. It is occasionally bothered by a caterpillar pest, *Characoma nilotica*, which has been called the “black olive” caterpillar. Objectionable staining on concrete is said to be a result of the frass of these caterpillars and only slightly associated with fallen leaves (Caldwell, 2008). The caterpillars are occasionally active on the upper foliage for several weeks from mid-April through early June. Another pest, the Eriophyid mite, feeds on the emerging drupes. The activity causes the drupes to develop into long, twisted, hornlike galls; hence the name oxhorn bucida. The infestation is sufficiently constant to have been regarded by earlier authors as a normal condition.

Uses

“Shady Lady” tends to be overplanted in some areas. This is a tough tree used for a wide variety of conditions. It is used as a shade, park, parking lot, industrial and ornamental street tree. ‘Shady Lady’ is highly wind resistance and salt tolerant and well adapted to seaside locations. The tree has a heavy wood that is difficult to work because of its high density and hardness. The wood is durable in contact with the ground and resistant to attack by dry-wood termites. The timber is used in fences, for heavy-duty flooring, and heavy exterior construction.



Flowering in April. Although said to be inconspicuous, the flowers are clearly visible when en masse.



Drooping inflorescence

Literature Cited

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