

## *Coccoloba diversifolia*

## Family: Polygonaceae



Early July



Immature fruits, early November

**Common Names:** Pigeon Plum, Dove Plum, Uva De Paloma, Uvilla

**Synonyms** (discarded names): *Coccoloba floridana*, *C. laurifolia*

**Origin:** South Florida, the Bahamas, Caribbean region, Yucatan, Belize, Guatemala

**U.S.D.A. Zone:** 10B-12B (34°F Minimum)

**Plant Type:** Small to medium-sized tree

**Growth Rate:** Slow-Moderate

**Typical Dimensions:** 20-40' tall x 10-30' wide

**Leaf Persistence:** Evergreen

**Leaf Type:** Simple

**Flowering Months:** Spring to early summer

**Light Requirements:** Medium, high

**Salt Tolerance:** High

**Drought Tolerance:** High

**Soil Requirements:** Wide

**Nutritional Requirements:** Low

**Wind Tolerance:** High

**Environmental Concerns:** Little invasive potential

**Major Potential Pests:** Chewing and sucking insects

**Propagation:** Seeds

**Human Hazards:** None

**Uses:** Specimen, parking lot islands, sidewalk cutouts, decks, patios, shade, buffers, hedges

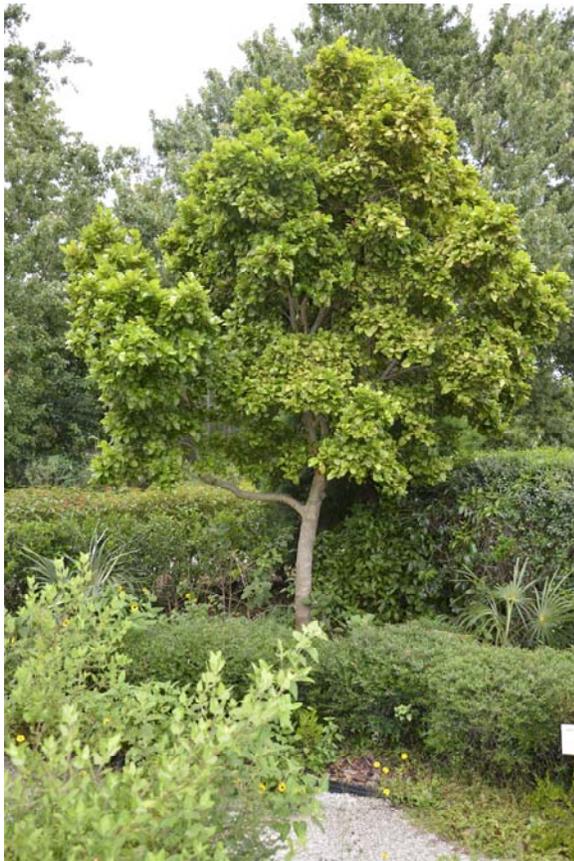
### Distribution

Pigeon Plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*) has a narrower natural range than its close relative, the seagrape (*C. uvifera*). It is restricted to South Florida, the Bahamas, much of the Caribbean, and parts of Central America. In Florida, its native habitat extends as far north as Lee and Broward Counties. However, it is often cultivated as a landscape tree in much of Southern Florida. In protected areas, pigeon plum grows as far north as Pinellas County on the west coast and Brevard County on the east coast.

### Growth Habit

Pigeon plum or dove plum is a small to medium size upright tree. It naturally develops a very formal outline. Symmetrical and densely compacted; the crown is oval to round, sometimes vase-shaped. The tree has a slow to moderate growth rate and is typically 20 to 40 feet tall and 6 to 10 inches in trunk diameter. It is noticeably taller than wide. Pigeon plum is more commonly seen as a straight-trunked tree, being somewhat fastigiate. Large trunks may be buttressed, fluted, or angled. Young twigs are green, becoming gray or sometimes brown. The branches are thickly clothed with leaves. Gray when young, the bark peels in large plates with age. It becomes mottled, with light and dark patches, similar to that of *C. uvifera*.

Most vegetative growth is largely from lateral buds below old inflorescences. Individual trees vary widely in their time of new growth extension. At all times the tree is evergreen since old leaves do not fall until a new set is established. The leaves drop uniformly, usually in March.



Early June



Tree with several trunks, early June

Holly Chichester



Early June



Bark of immature tree



Trunk of mature tree

### Leaves

The leaf is simple, entire and alternately arranged. Leaf blades are tough, leathery and dark green. They vary in shape from elliptic to ovate. They are usually rounded at both ends but are sometimes blunt-pointed at the apex. The specific name (*diversifolia*) refers to the diversity in leaf size and to some extent diversity in shape. The largest leaves are on saplings, suckers and those in the shade. Petioles are short, generally 1/2 to 1 inch long. The twig at the leaf node is ringed with a green, gray or brown membranous sheath known as the ochrea.



Simple, entire leaf



Alternate leaf arrangement



Leaf intersections and ochreate leaf bases

### Flowers

Small, 3/16 inches across, whitish-green flowers are arranged in clusters known as racemes. The clusters are terminal and 1 1/2 to 6 inches long. Male and female flowers are borne on separate trees (dioecious), mostly appearing in the spring. They are small, 3/16 inches across, and have a short petiole, 1/16 inches long. Flowers are borne mostly in the summer.

### Fruits

The flowers on female trees are followed by small, oval to round fruits, about 1/2 inch in diameter. They ripen predominately in fall and winter; dark red or purplish. The berry-like achene are borne in clusters. The thin fleshy coat is surrounded by a single, large, hard "stone". Birds and small animals disperse eaten fruits which are perhaps too sour and astringent for most human taste unless set aside for a few days. Juice from the fruit is said to make a very good jelly and a fine wine. Fruit consumption by local people and their presence in local markets are mostly things of the past.



Unopened inflorescence in March



Early July



Mid September

## Use and Management

Homeowners enjoy its compact canopy as a shade tree. Its upright, narrow form also makes it well-suited as a lush attractive plant along boulevards, highway medians and anywhere cars are not anticipated to be parked. Trees are mostly planted by municipalities on roadways, in parks, and by buildings. Homeowners may find some difficulty finding trees for sale. They may have to go outside their area for purchasing or order one from a local nursery.

Pigeon plum will thrive in full sun or partial shade in moist fast-draining soils. It has good salt tolerance and is adapted to seaside environments. Once established in the landscape, it requires little care. Be sure to slice and otherwise dramatically disturb and pull away the root balls on pot-bound container grown trees.

Pigeon plum is an excellent wildlife value as birds use the dense canopy for roosting and nesting. They also feed on and disperse fruits and seeds. The tree is ideal for situations where buffer trees are required. Plant it at least 14 feet away from utility wires so that its natural growth will not be impeded.

Although pigeon plum makes a wonderful shade tree, the fallen fruits may create a litter problem on patios, sidewalks and along streets. This primarily occurs in the fall or winter. The inconvenience caused by messy fruits may be worth the striking effect of this native species. Consequently, do not plant where the fallen fruits will be a nuisance.

In its most northern range, cold snaps may cause sudden leaf fall. Wait until new leaf growth occurs before pruning away any dead wood. The tree quickly regrows a full compliment of leaves on the living wood. Pigeon plum leaves decay more rapidly than those of seagrapes, the latter seemingly takes forever to decompose.

If desired, some trees may have to be trained to a single trunk in the first few years after planting. Trees with fastigiated branches often have embedded or included bark. However, this does not appear to compromise the strength of the wood. The tight growth habit makes pruning almost unnecessary. However, lower branches will need to be removed over time for vehicle and clearance along streets.

## Pests

Occasionally, the leaves are bothered by leaf chewing beetles and the Sri Lanka weevil. Whiteflies, accompanied by sooty mold, is sometimes a significant pest. Control of beetles and weevils are usually not necessary.



Chewing damage by Sri Lanka weevils



Signs of whiteflies

## Pigeon Plum Trees



## References

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