

## *Coccoloba uvifera* (L.) L.

(*Coccolobis uvifera*, *Guaibara uvifera*)

## Sea-Grape

**Other Common Names:** Jamaican Kino, Platterleaf, Shore Sea-Grape, Uva Caleta, Uva De Playa, or Uvero.

**Family:** Polygonaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** USDA zones 10 (9b) to 11.

**Foliage:** Large, 4" to 6" (8") long by 5" to 8" (10") wide, rounded, reniform, to broadly obovate leathery glabrous evergreen leaves are coarse textured; the alternate leaves persist for two to three years before senescing; new growth emerges bronze red whereas maturing leaf blades are a lustrous dark olive to yellow green above, paler green beneath with tiny pubescence; the red pinnate veins are prominent; bases are broadly rounded to slightly cordate, while tips are emarginate to rounded with entire margins; the stout petioles have minute pubescence and are swollen at the base with red-brown stipular sheaths encircling the stem.

**Flower:** Dioecious flowers are greenish white in elongated mildly ornamental clusters; five small white sepals are present on the apetalous flowers; a single pistil and eight white stamens are present; blooms occur throughout the year, but most prolifically in spring.

**Fruit:** The drupe-like achenes occur throughout the year in the tropics, but are produced mostly in late summer in our region on older established female plants; the fruit derive their common names associated with grapes from their resemblance to small round ½" to 1" diameter fleshy translucent white-green, bluish to purple grapes with a light red angled nutlet at the center; fruit are held in narrow dense drooping racemes 6" to 10" (14") long; these "sea grapes" are ornamentally interesting and are eaten by many species of birds and mammals; the sour fruits are reported to be used in making jellies.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — stout twigs are orange-brown to brown in color with circular or oval leaf scars and elongated pale lenticels; Buds — terminal buds are larger, imbricate, and conical, than the lateral buds which are small and mostly encased in the persistent stipular sheath; Bark — gray to light brown exfoliating bark with lighter mottled patches is present on picturesquely contorted stems and stout trunks.

**Habit:** Sea-Grape is typically an evergreen shrub or small tree, 6' to 10' tall, where hardy in our region, but can be a medium size tree, 30' to 40' tall, in more tropical climates; trunks branch low and form irregularly branching patterns of exfoliating limbs; outlines are often irregularly rounded due to periodic dieback from cold damage or ocean winds in our region, whereas it eventually forms a rounded to vase-shaped tree in more tropical locations; growth rates are moderate and the overall texture is coarse.

**Cultural Requirements:** *Coccoloba uvifera* is suitable for full sun to part shade conditions on a variety of soil types with good internal and surface drainage characteristics; Sea-Grape is adapted to all but the most alkaline soils where it tends to become chlorotic; avoid excessive irrigation once established; Sea-Grape is tolerant of heat, drought, wind exposure, salty soils, and foliar salt spray; if a tree form is required, substantial pruning may be required to raise the foliage high enough to facilitate pedestrian or vehicular traffic.

**Pathological Problems:** Pathological problems are few, cold is the primary limiting factor; seagrape borer, red nipple gall, and various leaf feeding insects can sometimes damage plants in landscapes; mites, mealy bugs and scale insects can be pests in interiorscapes.

**Ornamental Assets:** Interesting leaves, a picturesque growth habit, exfoliating bark, and unusual fruit are all ornamental assets.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Fruit can be showy, but are messy in manicured landscapes, as can be the senescing leaves; despite its tolerance to windy exposed beaches, branches tend to split easily on larger tree-form plants due to bark inclusion in crotch angles.

**Landscape Utilization:** Use is limited in our region to deep South Texas and the Immediate Gulf Coast, where Sea-Grape is popular as a shrub or small tree in coastal landscapes; Sea-Grape's outstanding salt, drought, heat, and wind tolerances make it a favorite for plantings within direct exposure of ocean spray; while often serving as a street or shade tree in the tropics, *C. uvifera* is usually grown as a hedge, windbreak, screen, or dune stabilizing shrub on the Texas Gulf Coast; Sea-Grape is sometimes grown in large high light interiorscapes with mix success, but is more reliable as a large seasonal patio container plant that requires winter protection.

**Other Comments:** Although use is limited to a small portion of our region, *C. uvifera* is a ubiquitous part of coastal landscapes throughout tropical and warm subtropical regions of the world; the hard heavy wood is dark brown with violet streaks and is used in cabinet and furniture making; early settlers once used the leaves as

substitute for paper in leaving notes and practicing writing; the genus name derives from that of a Greek word “kokkolobis” for a lobed berry, the specific epithet means bearing grapes.

**Native Habitat:** Sea-Grape originates from the Caribbean basin, including South Florida, but is not native to Texas; due to its numerous ornamental assets, *C. uvifera* has been planted and naturalized pantropically.

**Related Taxa:** *Coccoloba diversifolia* N.J. von Jacquin (*Coccoloba floridana*, *Coccoloba laurifolia*), the Dove-Plum, Guayabillo, Picurero, Pigeon-Plum, Snailseed, Tie-Tongue, is also common in tropical coastal landscapes, but is even less cold tolerant (USDA zones 10 – 11) than *C. uvifera* so it is seldom encountered in Texas; it is potentially a somewhat larger tree than *C. uvifera* with more ovate leaves, and like Sea-Grape is planted for its tolerance to coastal conditions; Pigeon-Plum has messy fruit, but very attractive exfoliating bark on older specimens; the genus *Coccoloba* P. Browne (*Campderia*, *Coccolobis*) contains about 150 trees and shrubs from the New World tropics and subtropics.

**References:** Black and Gilman, 2004; Dehgan, 1998; Elias, 1980; Gilman, 1997; Haehle and Brookwell, 1999; Loeb and Carpenter, 1992; Macoboy, 1991; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Riffle, 1998; Sargent, 1965; Stresau, 1986; Wasson, 2003; Watkins and Sheehan, 1975.

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