

Mexican Sycamore (*Platanus mexicana*)¹

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Mexican sycamore (*Platanus mexicana*) is a fast growing, drought tolerant tree boasting smooth white and tan bark and large, maple-like leaves with velvety, silver undersides. Native to northeastern and central Mexico, this tree's cold hardiness is not well defined. However, Mexican sycamore grows well as far north as USDA Cold Hardiness Zone 8b in Texas and Florida.



Figure 1. Mexican Sycamore (*Platanus mexicana*)
 Credits: Gary Knox

Mexican sycamore is slightly smaller than our native American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*). While known

to grow up to 80 feet or more in the wild, Mexican sycamore typically reaches a mature height of 50 feet in the landscape, with a width of about 30 feet. The tree is deciduous, with an upright rounded crown. Mexican sycamore grows best in full sun and is adapted to most soils, including alkaline soils. While considered drought tolerant, the best success occurs when plants are irrigated until established.

The lobed, maple-like leaves are up to 8 inches wide and olive-green, sometimes turning yellow before falling in December. Leaf undersides of mature trees (at least 4 to 6 years old) develop short, dense, whitish hairs, resulting in an attractive silvery appearance. The large leaves can be a nuisance if they fall where leaves must be raked. Like the American sycamore, the aggressive roots and relatively large mature size of this tree suggest that it should not be used near structures and pavement or under power lines.

Male and female flowers are borne separately on the same plant from December through February, and appear as greenish balls hanging from the branches. Aggregate-like fruit about 1 1/2 inches in diameter follow in April through August.

Mexican sycamore is resistant to bacterial leaf scorch, which can be a problem on American sycamore. This bacterium causes leaves to curl and turn brown and may eventually kill American sycamore. Two fungal diseases occasionally affecting Mexican sycamore are anthracnose and powdery mildew. Anthracnose causes moderate to

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severe leaf drop during cool, wet springs. Initial symptoms are light brown areas forming along the veins of new leaves; if severe, anthracnose can cause cankers as well as leaf drop. Powdery mildew appears as a whitish dust on leaves.

Sycamore lace bugs may feed on leaf undersides in late summer and fall. The feeding results in a stippled appearance on the top of the leaf and black spots of feces on the underside. So far, observations of this tree in Florida suggest that infestations of sycamore lace bugs are not as severe as on American sycamore. Aphids may also feed on leaves; they cause little damage to the tree, but they exude honeydew upon which sooty mold grows and turns leaf surfaces black.

Mexican sycamore is an attractive, smaller statured alternative to American sycamore. Unfortunately, it is not commonly grown by Florida nurseries and may be difficult to find.

Platanus mexicana (Mexican sycamore) has not yet been evaluated using the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/>). Without this assessment, the temporary conclusion is that *P. mexicana* is not a problem species at this time and may be recommended.



Figure 2. Closeup of the silvery underside of a Mexican Sycamore leaf
Credits: Gary Knox