



Expanding Tree Diversity in Hawaii's Landscapes: Leopard Tree, Brazilian Ironwood, *Caesalpinia ferrea*

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Named for its very hard wood, Brazilian ironwood has a lacy, umbrella-shaped crown with slightly drooping branches. It does not cast heavy shade, as its leaves are rather feathery and delicate. The trunk is smooth with whitish, gray, and dark patches that peel off as the bark ages, giving rise to the other common name of leopard tree. Its mature height is about 50–65 ft, with a spread of about 30–40 ft.

Recommended Use in Landscapes

- Street tree
- Parks and gardens
- Specimen or accent tree
- Tropical effect
- Group plantings



Seedpods and foliage of leopard tree

Distribution

- Native to eastern Brazil

Propagation Techniques

- Propagated by seed
- Slow to germinate
- Scarification increases germination rate.



Leopard tree as a street tree.

Cultural Requirements and Tolerances

- Tropical to sub-tropical to warm temperate climates
- Tolerant of city street conditions (shading from buildings, sidewalks over the roots)
- Does well in most soils, but struggles in long dry periods, so moist soils are preferred
- Narrow crotch angles suggest that early pruning is helpful to develop a single leader trunk.

Flower and Fruit Characteristics

- Small, yellow pea-like flowers
- Fragrant
- Borne during summer in clusters at the ends of branches
- Fruits are dark brown, woody, flattened pods 2–3 inches long, containing one or two seeds.
- Pod is indehiscent.

Leaf Characteristics

- Structure is bipinnately compound with 4–5 pairs of leaflets on each pinna.
- Leaflets about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm), oval to round.



An old leopard tree can reach to 65 ft. in height.

Advantages for Use in Landscapes

- Slow growing
- Attractive bark
- Evergreen in tropics
- WRA = -3

Disadvantages for Use in Landscapes

- Seed pod drop
- Narrow crotch angles suggest limb breakage is possible in strong winds.

Other Uses

- Used medicinally in Brazil for the treatment of diabetes mellitus and for internal ulcers; it is an anti-inflammatory agent and has potent anti-cancer-forming properties.



Seed pods contain a hard, flat seed.



Mottled bark of the leopard tree.