



Podocarpus ¹

S. A. Rose²

Podocarpus are evergreen trees that will thrive throughout Florida. Of the numerous species, *Podocarpus macrophylla* and *Podocarpus nagi* are the most common ones grown in this region.

Podocarpus are very cold-hardy and also quite salt tolerant. These two characteristics make it very desirable for use in coastal areas.

Podocarpus macrophylla is the most common species. It is capable of attaining a height of 50 feet or more. Its willow-like leaves are dark green above and paler beneath with a very noticeable mid-rib. Leaves may reach four inches in length and about one-fourth in width.

Male flowers are yellow, catkin-like (rat-tail like) and will gradually turn brown and fall to the ground. Female flowers are greenish in color and not too noticeable. The fruit is a drupe or berry-like, purplish, and the fleshy part is about one-half inch in length. The green seed is attached to this fleshy stem. The fleshy stem is edible but the foliage has been toxic to some animals -- especially cats.

Podocarpus nagi is a tree that may attain a height of 40 feet or more. Its leaves are larger than those of *Podocarpus macrophylla*. They are about three inches in length and one inch in width. (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

PLANTING

Best growth can be expected when plants are set in a well-drained, improved soil, in sun or partial shaded location. Plants should be set at the same depth they were grown in containers or field. A saucer-shaped depression around the plant is desirable to retain water.

Plants should be watered daily for a few days by filling the depression, and then only as needed to prevent wilting.

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2. S. A. Rose, Department of Environmental Horticulture, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

Container grown plants can be set out at any time. Field-grown plants that have been properly handled and balled and burlapped may also be transplanted successfully at any time. However, large field grown plants are difficult to move and survive without previous root pruning. Many growers will not sell these large field grown plants immediately after digging. They will carry these plants for a few weeks to harden them off and to determine if they will survive. Because of this problem, it usually is best to transplant large plants during the cooler season - fall, winter and spring.

FERTILIZING

Podocarpus are fertilized according to size. Trees with less than a 6-inch trunk diameter will require 2 to 3 pounds (4 to 6 level coffee cups) of a 6 - 6 - 6 type fertilizer or its equivalent, per inch of trunk diameter. Trunks over 6" in diameter will require 5 pounds (10 level coffee cups) of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter. This amount is applied each year but amounts may be split in two or three applications, if desired. If plants have not grown much for their age, less fertilizer should be applied to prevent possible root injury.

USES

Podocarpus will grow into fairly large trees if permitted to grow naturally. Thus they will make good specimen plants or may be used for tall hedges or screen plantings. *Podocarpus macrophylla* has been used to a great extent in foundation planting and as a hedge. In both cases, frequent shearing will be required to prevent overgrowth in their location.

Podocarpus foliage has also found use in flower shops' floral designs. There are commercial growers that produce these plants specifically for florist use.

PROPAGATION

Plants can be started from seeds or cuttings. Seeds often are found sprouting while still attached to the fleshy stalk on the plant. Using four to six inch tip cuttings is another means of producing new plants. Cuttings will require 10 to 12 weeks to root.

PROBLEMS

Scale insects attach themselves to twigs or leaves, sucking out the plant juices.

Leaf spot - a fungus affecting plant foliage. In severe cases, affected foliage will drop prematurely. Control will consist of sanitation and fungicide applications.

Root rot - a disease affecting plant root systems and eventually causing its death. No chemical control available. Sanitation will help prevent or delay rot.

Nematodes - parasitic animals that affect mainly the plant root system causing gradual plant decline and eventual death. A nematicide drench will lower nematode population if applied on an annual basis.