

Trumpet-tree

Cecropia obtusifolia Bertol.

Mulberry family (Moraceae)

Post-Cook introduction

The trumpet-tree, introduced as watershed cover, is easily recognized by the very open crown of few stout hollow branches and few very large long-stalked umbrellalike leaves deeply divided into 9–15 oblong lobes, whitish beneath. A medium-sized evergreen tree to 50 ft (15 m) high, with branches arising high and curving upward. The trunk to 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter has a few prop roots at base. Bark light gray, smooth and warty, with prominent rings. Inner bark whitish, fibrous, almost tasteless, its sap turning black on exposure. Branches few, very stout, hairy, greenish gray, smooth with prominent rings and dots, and hollow. End buds large, shortpointed, about 4 inches (10 cm) long, covered by a large dark red hairy scale (stipule), which falls early, leaving a ring scar.

The few leaves alternate at ends of branches have very large round reddish hairy leafstalks of 6–16 inches (15–40 cm). The leathery rounded blades 10–20 inches (25–51 cm) in diameter have the leafstalk inserted near the middle (peltate), with 9–15 long oblong lobes often broadest beyond middle, with apex short-pointed or rounded, each lobe with dark red midvein and many straight parallel side veins. Upper surface dull dark green and rough, lower surface whitish green and finely hairy.

Flower clusters (groups of spikes) paired at leaf bases, develop inside a large pointed pinkish hairy bud scale, and bear very numerous tiny flowers, male and female on different trees (dioecious). The male flower cluster is composed of 12–15 yellow ropelike branches $3\frac{1}{4}$ – $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (8–14 cm) long and more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) in diameter, hanging from a stalk of $1\frac{1}{2}$ –4 inches (4–10 cm). The tiny yellow male flowers $\frac{1}{32}$ inch (1 mm) long have a tubular calyx and 2 stamens. Female flower cluster consists of 3–6 greenish or whitish ropelike branches 6–14 inches (15–36 cm) long and $\frac{3}{16}$ inch (5 mm) in diameter, hanging from a stalk to 6 inches (15 cm) long. The numerous tiny female flowers in a mass of whitish hairs have tubular calyx and pistil with one-celled ovary, one ovule, short style, and enlarged hairy stigma.

The fruiting branches (multiple fruits) consist of 3–6 long greenish or gray ropelike branches more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) thick and slightly fleshy, hairy when dry, covered with brown dots. These are the individual one-seeded fruits

(achenes), less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) long, dark brown.

The wood is yellowish and soft, with large pith, hollow in branches. According to tests elsewhere, it is suitable for pulpwood. The fibrous bark has been made into ropes. The wood of a closely related species, *Cecropia peltata* L., from Puerto Rico was tested at the Forest Products Laboratory and found to be suitable for certain low value uses as lumber or veneer. The wood is similar to that of black cottonwood in density and strength, but has a very high tangential shrinkage, which results in severe drying degrade (Bendtsen 1964).

Sparingly introduced in Hawaii. It was aerially seeded in the Panaewa Forest Reserve near Hilo in 1928 and has become naturalized there and in the lower Waiakea Forest Reserve. It is also common near Kilauea, Kauai, where it has naturalized, and at the end of Manoa Road on Oahu. A total of only 752 trees are recorded as having been planted by the Division of Forestry, mostly in 1927 and 1928. It is a pioneer and weed tree of very rapid growth in clearings, other open areas, and secondary forests.

Special areas: Waimea Arboretum, Waiakea

Champion

Height 70 ft (21.3 m, c.b.h. 9 ft (2.7 m), spread 72 ft (21.9 m). Paradise Park, Honolulu, Oahu (1968).

Range

Native from Mexico and Belize through Central America to Panama and northern South America

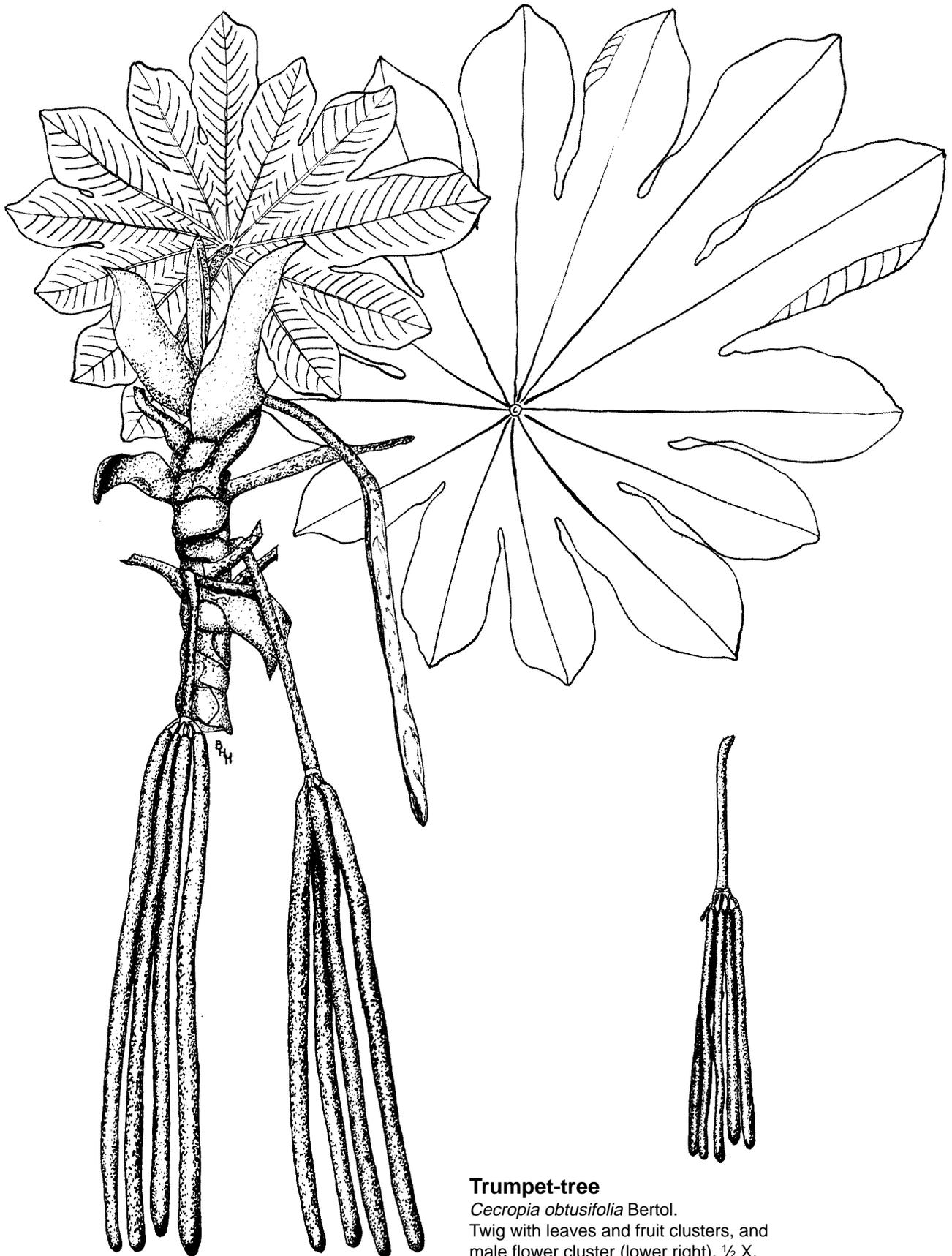
Other common names: trumpet; guarumo (Spanish)

Botanical synonym: *Cecropia mexicana* Hemsli.

In Hawaii, this species apparently was introduced under the name of a related West Indian trumpet-tree, *Cecropia peltata* L., which was also planted. The latter, which is common in Puerto Rico, differs in leaves less deeply divided into short rounded lobes and the 2–5 short stout fruiting branches $2\frac{1}{2}$ –4 inches (6–10 cm) long and $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (10–13 mm) in diameter.

The English common name refers to a use of the hollow branches and leafstalks for trumpets or other musical instruments.

Hollow branches of this and related species in their native homes are inhabited by biting ants that bore holes to the interior. Early naturalists supposed that the ants repaid the tree by driving away other insects. However, the related trees in Puerto Rico have no ant dwellers and are abundant. On the Hawaiian trees, few small harmless ants, also introduced, were noted.



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Twig with leaves and fruit clusters, and male flower cluster (lower right), 1/2 X.