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UF/IFAS Extension Hernando County Fact Sheet 2015-03

White Lead Tree *(Leucaena leucocephala)*

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Lead tree is the common name for all members of the Leucaena genus. White lead tree refers to this particular tree's whitish blossoms. The lead tree is native to Mexico and Central America, but it is cultivated throughout the tropics, and it has widely escaped and naturalized. In the United States, it has been reported as an adventive from Arizona, California, Florida, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Texas and the Virgin Islands. In Hernando County the tree is mostly located along the coast, but has been found growing in alkaline soils further inland. White lead tree grows best in full sunlight and can reach heights of up to 60 feet.

The leaves are alternately arranged, bipinnately compound, and typically 10 inches in length. Each leaflet is ½ inch long and spear-shaped. The bark is lightly textured and grayish-brown in color when mature. Flowers are white and grow in globe-shaped clusters at the ends of the branches, with each cluster being less than 1 inch wide. Fruits are 4- to 6-inch-long, flat pods that are 1–2 inches wide. Pods have raised edges, turn from green to brown with maturity, and contain 10–30 oval-shaped, brown seeds.

In Florida, white leadtree is considered a category II invasive species, and has the potential to displace native plant communities because it is an aggressive competitor for resources. As a result, ***the Division of Plant Industry strictly prohibits possessing (including collecting), transporting (including importing), and cultivating this species.*** In its native range, however, white lead tree is planted as a shade tree.

The tree is frost-sensitive, and, except in very protected sites, it is killed to the ground during most winters in northern Florida. However, regrowth is rapid and most trees recover sufficiently to produce large crops of seeds. The abundantly produced seeds are the only effective means of dispersal. The light, flat pods are readily blown about by the wind. The seeds germinate readily without pre-treatment, and large numbers of seedlings have been observed around mother plants in Gainesville.

Adapted from UF/IFAS Extension EDIS Document #FOR299 written by Michael Andreu, Melissa Friedman, and Robert Northrop. Visit the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Figure 1. Flower, seed pods and leaves of lead tree. *(Dan Clark, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org)*

Figure 2. Compound leaves of lead tree. *(Dan Clark, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org)*

Figure 3. Close-up of a lead tree flower. *(Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, Bugwood.org)*

Figure 4. A group of lead tree flowers. *(Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, Bugwood.org)*

Figure 5. A lead tree flower. *(Dan Clark, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org)*

Figure 6. A mature lead tree with seed pods. *(Tony Pernas, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org)*