

FLORIDA TORREYA
FLORIDA NUTMEG
Torreya taxifolia
(Yew Family)

by Dr. Kim D. Coder, Professor, Warnell School, University of Georgia

The Florida torreya is a small to medium sized, evergreen tree with a pungent, aromatic odor. Trees have horizontal and spreading branches with drooping tips. Mature height is 10.6 meters (35 feet) tall and mature diameter is 18cm (1.5 feet).

Needles are stiff, pointed, 2.5-4cm (1-1 1/2 inches) long and 3mm (0.13 inches) wide with the upper surface shiny dark green and lower surface pale green to silvery green with two distinct whitish bands.

Bark is brown to dark brown with an orange cast.

Male and female flowers (cones) are on different trees. Flowers appear in March and April.

Fruit (female cone) is 2.5-3cm (1-1 1/4 inches) long, dark green with a fleshy outer-layer that has a purple cast and whitish bloom. Ripe fruit is similar in appearance to a green olive.

A similar species is the Florida yew Taxus floridana which grows in the same area. The Florida yew has a low spreading crown and short, soft needles that are pale yellow-green below with no distinct white bands. The Florida yew has a female cone partially surrounded with a bright red cup.

The Florida *torreya* is found in rich, hardwood hammock forests along the Apalachicola River and its tributaries in western Florida and far southwest Georgia. Sites have rich, moist, sandy-loam soils.

Figure 1 shows the general regional distribution. This species is only native in four counties in Georgia (1 conty) and Florida (3 counties). This species is federally listed as endangered. There are no large mature trees left in the native range. A few large mature trees of both sexes exist outside the native range of the species. Figure 2 provides a county distribution for Georgia.

Burning, soil/site disturbance, thinning or clearing overstory vegetation can destroy habitat. Wild hogs have destroyed many seedlings. In the early 1960s a root-rot/needle blight pest complex began to destroy most of the older trees. Natural pest cycles, destruction of habitat, and stress patterns constraining ecological competitiveness have lead to the decline of Torreya and reduction of its range.

Figure 1: General distribution in the Southeastern US.

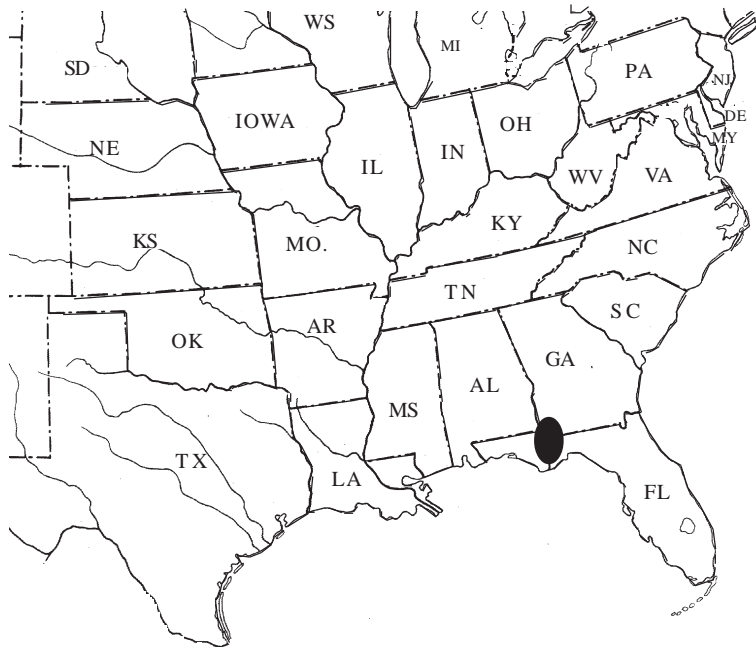


Figure 2: General distribution in Georgia.





Male and female trees
side-by-side in historic
residential neighborhood.



Upward view into crown base and periderm (bark) surface of main stem.



Foliage / needles.





Young female cones,
fallen mature female cones,
and male cones on
underside of needles.

