

## SMALL-FRUITED VARNISHLEAF

*Dodonaea elaeagnoides* Rudolph ex Ledeb. & Alderstam

**Synonyms:** *Dodonaea microcarya* Small;  
*Dodonaea ehrenbergii* Schltldl.

**Family:** Sapindaceae (soapberry)

**FNAI Ranks:** G4/S1

**Legal Status:** US-none FL-Endangered



Leaves thick and leathery in texture the broadest point well past the midpoint of the blade. Photo © Douglas Goldman.

**Field Description:** Shrub or small tree to 3 m tall. **Leaves** 2.5 - 5 cm long, alternate, simple, entire, evergreen, wider above the middle, with broadly rounded tips and leathery, varnished surfaces; veins inconspicuous. **Female and male flowers** usually on separate plants, with 5 yellow-green sepals and no petals, in elongated, branched clusters on leafy shoots. **Fruit** approximately 0.6 cm long, with 3 papery wings slightly joined at the top.

**Similar Species:** Varnishleaf (*Dodonaea viscosa*), a common coastal shrub, has winged fruits nearly 2.5 cm long, with wings not joined at the top; its leaf veins are prominent, and leaves are larger, up to 15 cm long. Seven-year apple (*Genipa clusiifolia*) and (*Scaveola sericea* var. *taccada*) have similar but larger leaves.

**Related Rare Species:** Other rare members of the soapberry family include white ironwood (*Hypelate trifoliata*) and Florida cupania (*Cupania glabra*).

**Habitat:** Pine rocklands, rockland hammocks, especially along ecotones between coastal hammocks and coastal marshes.

**Best Survey Season:** Summer-fall; fruits spring and summer.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Monroe County Keys, FL; Bahamas, Cuba, Santa Domingo, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, St. Eustation.

**Conservation Status:** As of 2025, all of the 11 extant occurrences occur on conservation lands in Monroe County, Keys including Monroe County Managed Areas, National Key Deer Refuge, Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area, Florida Keys Overseas Heritage State Trail, Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park, Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, John J. Pescatello Torchwood Hammock Preserve, and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge. Threatened by typical threats in the Florida Keys including invasive species, severe weather and climate change, and roads and coastal development. Since all occurrences are in the Florida Keys, severe weather and climate change remain a potential threat.

**Protection and Management:** Control non-native invasive plants.

**References:** Coile 2000, IRC 1999, Leenhouts 1983, Small 1933, Tomlinson 1980, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a. Weakley 2024.



Flowers with 5 yellow-green sepals and no petals, in elongated, branched clusters on leafy shoots. Photo © Douglas Goldman.



Fruit approximately 0.6 cm long, with 3 papery wings slightly joined at the top. Photo © Douglas Goldman.