



Clusia rosea Pitch-Apple¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This wide-spreading, densely-foliated, rounded, 25 to 30-foot-tall, evergreen tree has a short trunk and broad, thickened, dark green, leathery leaves, reminiscent of Southern Magnolia leaves (Fig. 1). It is, in fact, greatly admired in Cuba and the Virgin Islands as an ornamental. Leaves can be written on with a fingernail. In summer, the showy, pink and white, two to three-inch flowers appear at night and sometimes remain open all morning on overcast days. They appear near the branch tips and are followed by a fleshy, light green, poisonous fruit, three inches in diameter. These persistent fruits turn black when ripe and split open, revealing bright red seeds surrounded by a black, resinous material. The seeds are very attractive to birds and other wildlife and they germinate readily in the landscape and surrounding areas. The black material surrounding these seeds was once used to caulk the seams of boats, hence its common name, 'Pitch-Apple'.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Clusia rosea*

Pronunciation: KLOO-see-uh ROE-zee-uh

Common name(s): Pitch-Apple, Florida Clusia

Family: *Clusiaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide);

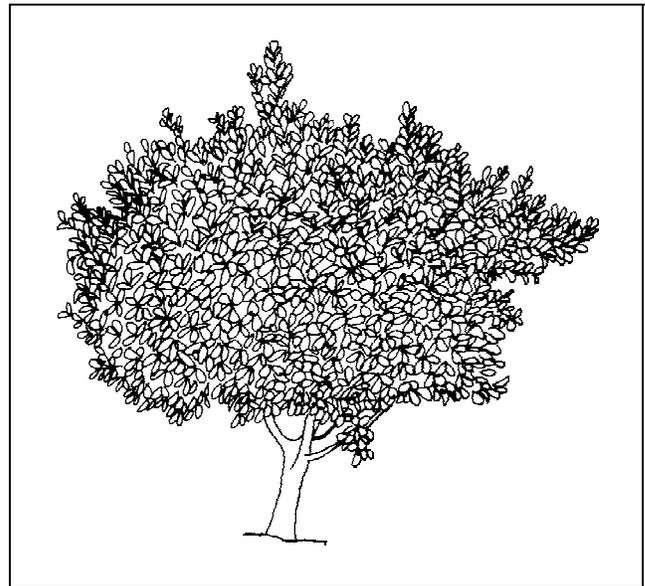


Figure 1. Middle-aged Pitch-Apple.

recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a standard; shade tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round; spreading
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: medium
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches; 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; white
Flower characteristics: showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: black; green
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

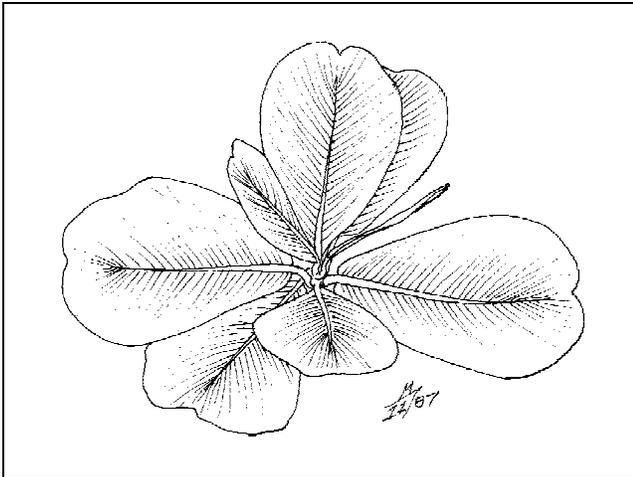


Figure 3. Foliage of Pitch-Apple.

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: good

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Growing well in full sun to dappled shade, Pitch-Apple tolerates many different soil types but grows most rapidly on moist soils. It is quite tolerant of light open sands and salt spray, making it ideal for seaside locations. Pitch-Apple is often used as a screen due to its low spreading habit and is ideal for espalier to cool building walls in the summer. Some maintenance is required to trim prop roots and aerial roots as they form from the trunk base and lower branches, or the

tree could take over an area. Otherwise, it is a low-maintenance tree. With lower branches removed, it can make an attractive, small to moderately-sized street tree, although some people object to the falling fruits and thick slowly decomposing leaves. A patio can be kept cooler with a Pitch-Apple which creates a dense shade. Plants should be watered well until established and then trees develop rapidly.

Purchase trees which have been trained in the nursery to one central leader for street tree use. Those grown for specimen use with several upright trunks are not suited for streets, as vehicle clearance will be difficult to maintain and trees will be less durable.

The cultivar with marbled leaves, *Clusia rosea* 'Variegata', has unusual and very striking, yellow and green variegated foliage.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Pests

Scale.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.