



## *Clusia rosea* Pitch-Apple<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### 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);

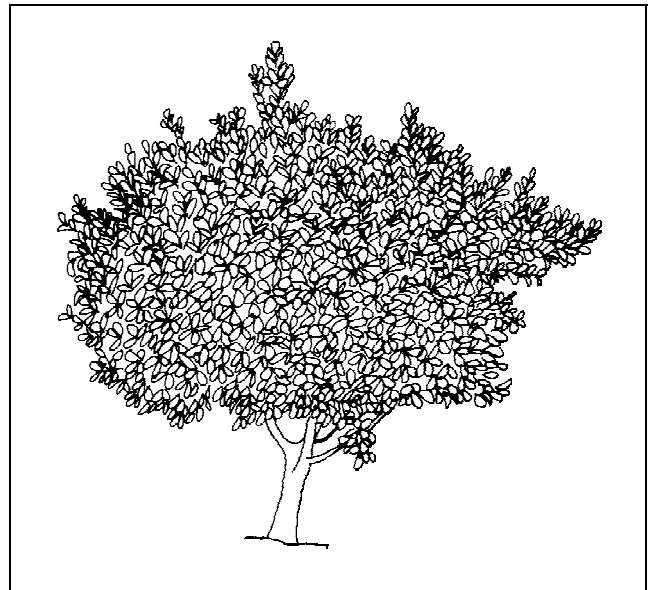


Figure 1. Middle-aged Pitch-Apple.

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

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-172, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



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**

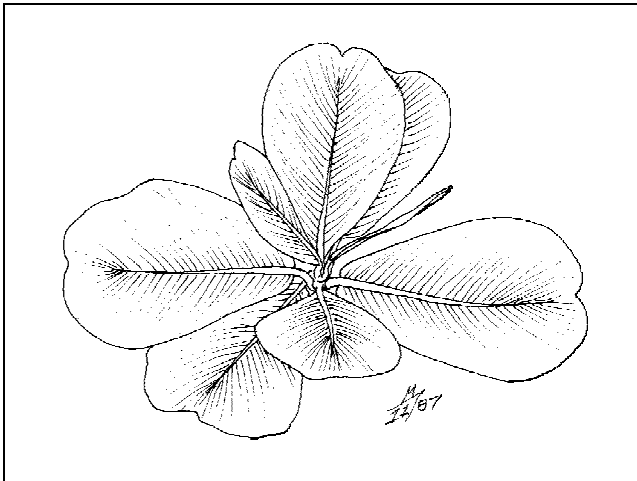
**Flower color:** pink; white  
**Flower characteristics:** showy; summer flowering

**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.