

Manilkara zapota: Sapodilla¹

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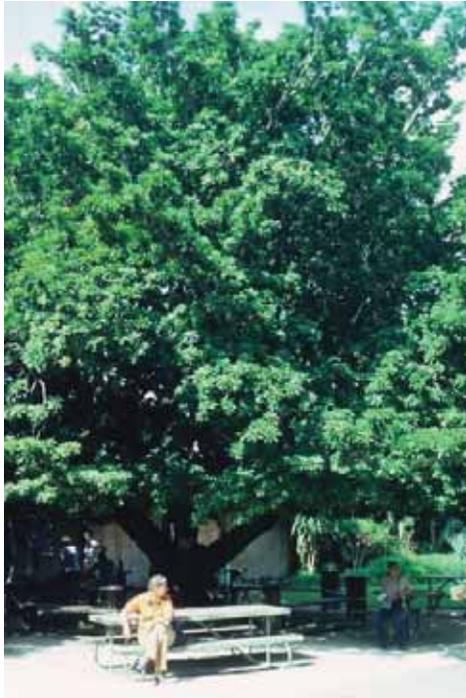


Figure 1. Mature *Manilkara zapota*: Sapodilla
Credits: R.A. Howard @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Introduction

A superb shade, street (where falling fruit will not be a problem), or fruit tree, Sapodilla reaches a height of 45 feet with a 40-foot spread. The smooth, dark, and glossy, six-inch-long evergreen leaves are clustered at the tips of twigs and the small, cream-colored solitary flowers appear in the leaf axils throughout the year. The four-inch-wide, scurfy brown fruits have a juicy, sweet, yellow-brown flesh and

ripen to softness in spring and summer. The flower-to-fruit period is about ten months. The bark and branches, when injured, bleed a white latex which is the source of chicle, the original base for chewing gum. The trunk on older specimens is flaky and quite attractive, and flares at the base into numerous surface roots.

General Information

Scientific name: *Manilkara zapota*

Pronunciation: man-ill-KAR-uh zuh-POE-tuh

Common name(s): Sapodilla

Family: *Sapotaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: According to the IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group 2008), *Manilkara zapota* is invasive and not recommended in the central and south zone in Florida (to see if any exceptions for specified and limited use have been approved since publication, check the Conclusions Table at: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/conclusions.html>). It is not considered a problem species and may be recommended in the north zone in Florida (counties listed by zone at: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/assess_counties.pdf)

Uses: hedge; shade; fruit; street without sidewalk; specimen; highway median; screen

Availability: not native to North America

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 45 feet
Spread: 35 to 45 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: pyramidal, round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Figure 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

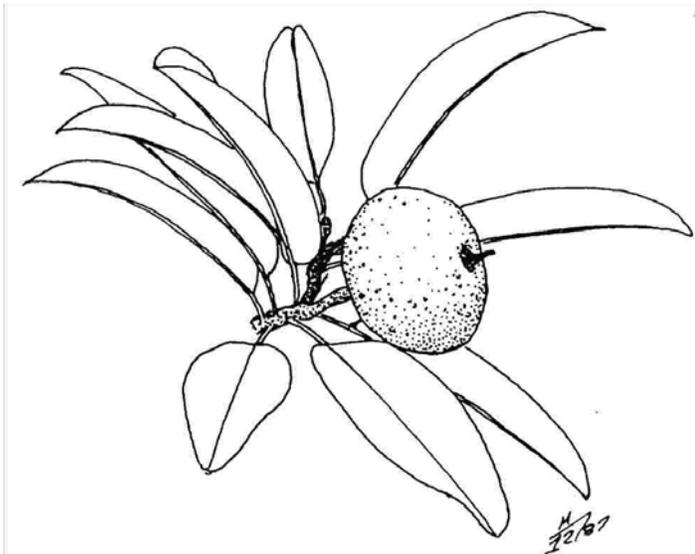


Figure 3. Fruit

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: little required
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green, brown
Current year twig thickness: medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Requiring full sun for best growth and form, Sapodilla is a tough tree tolerating a variety of poor soils but will grow better on well-drained soils. It has a good salt tolerance and is very drought and wind-resistant, enduring hurricanes very well. Thinning the very dense crown will help to increase grass and other plant growth beneath the crown and increase wind tolerance. These traits make it ideal for seaside locations. The trunk and roots grow quite large on older specimens, so locate no closer than about eight to ten feet from sidewalks and curbs. It makes a superb specimen tree for a large residential landscape or commercial landscape.

A central trunk often develops with little training. It dominates the young tree forming a pyramidal-shaped canopy. Improper pruning practices such as topping, forms many clustered leaders and can shorten the life of the tree.

Superior fruit cultivars are available: 'Prolific', 'Brown Sugar', 'Modello', and 'Russel'. *Manilkara bahamensis*, the Wild Dilly, is native to the Florida Keys and has less desirable fruit.

Propagation is usually by seed, with superior varieties being veneer-grafted.

Pests

Scales and fruit flies occasionally cause problems. Seedlings develop in the landscape where they could become a slight weed problem.

Literature Cited

Fox, A.M., D.R. Gordon, J.A. Dusky, L. Tyson, and R.K. Stocker. 2008. IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas: Status Assessment. Cited from the Internet (November 16, 2012), http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/status_assessment.pdf