



Crescentia cujete Calabash-Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

Calabash is an evergreen tree reaching 20 to 30 feet in height with a broad, irregular crown composed of long, spreading branches clothed in two to six-inch-long bright green leaves, which create moderate shade beneath the tree (Fig. 1). Calabash is most outstanding in the landscape for its year-round production of flowers and fruit, both of which are unusual. The two-inch-wide flowers are yellow/green with red or purple veins, cup-shaped, and appear to emerge directly from the branches. These are followed by the emergence of the large, round fruit, 5 to 12 inches in diameter, with a smooth, hard shell, which hang directly beneath the branches. Fruits are poisonous.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Crescentia cujete*
Pronunciation: kress-EN-tee-uh koo-JEE-tee
Common name(s): Calabash-Tree
Family: *Bignoniaceae*
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

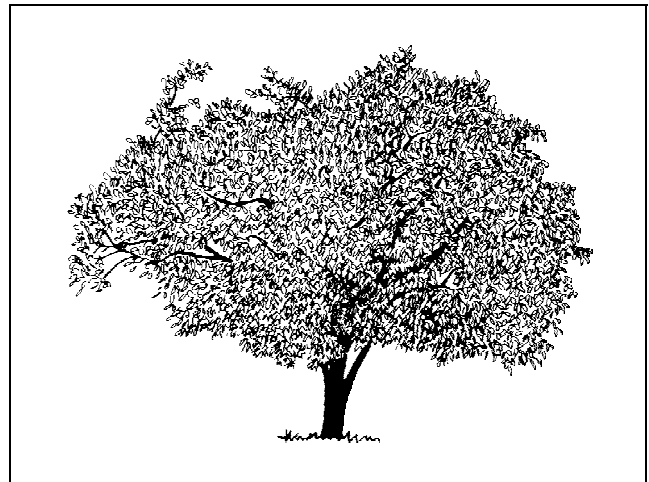


Figure 1. Middle-aged Calabash-Tree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 25 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; spreading
Crown density: open
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green; yellow

Flower characteristics: showy; unpleasant fragrance; year round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; showy

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; showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig thickness: medium; thick

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

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: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

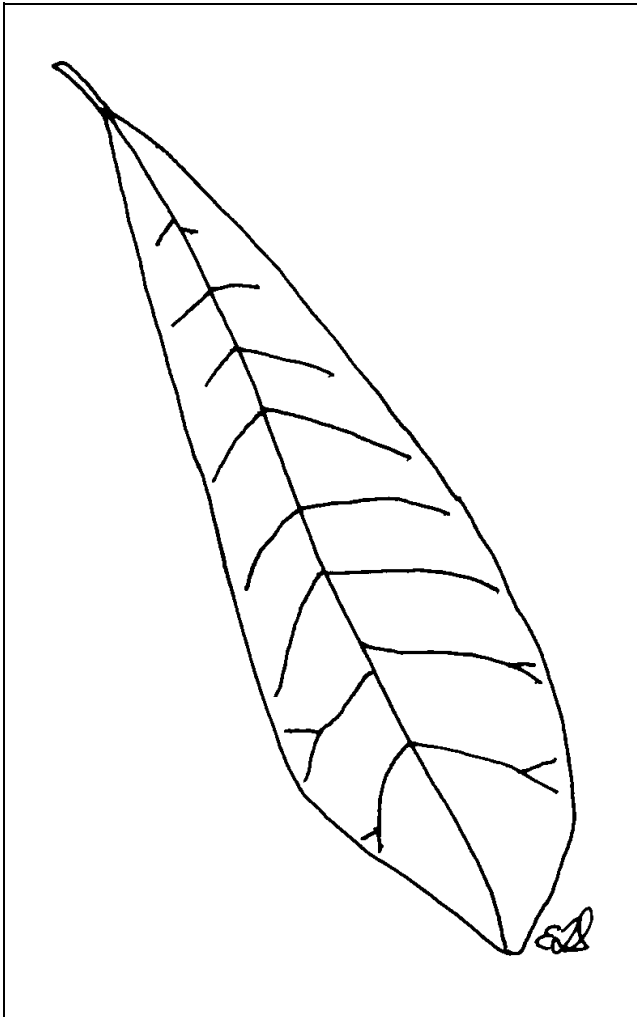


Figure 3. Foliage of Calabash-Tree.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally bothered by Chinese rose beetles and a leaf-webbing caterpillar.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Calabash tree should be grown in full sun on any well-drained soil.

The main limbs on Calabash originate close to the ground forming a low-branched tree without training or pruning. These limbs branch infrequently, forming a heavy, awkward-looking canopy. This is suitable for planting in an open area where there is plenty of space. Prune the tips of the branches regularly when the tree is young to develop more secondary branches close to the trunk. This will help increase the diameter of the main branches and thicken the canopy. The trunk can be trained straight by staking, and lateral branches directed to grow upright.

Propagation is by seed.