



Manilkara zapota Sapodilla¹

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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 (Fig. 1). 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 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: fruit tree; hedge; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

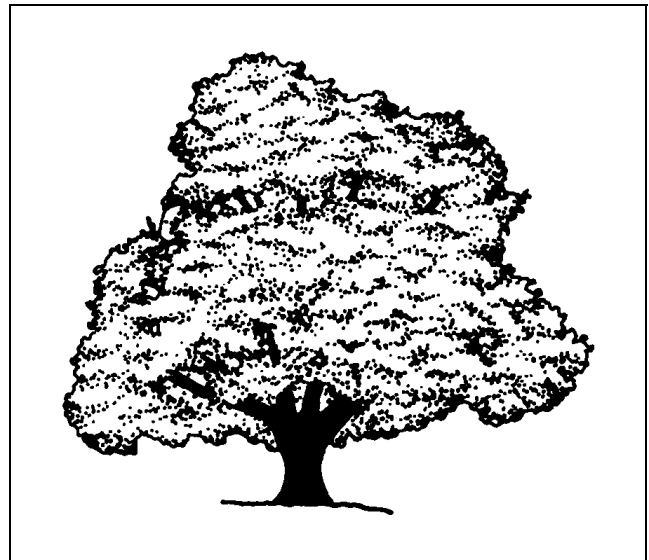


Figure 1. Mature Sapodilla.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 45 feet

Spread: 35 to 45 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; pyramidal

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: medium

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

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

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; year round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round (Fig. 3)
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

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

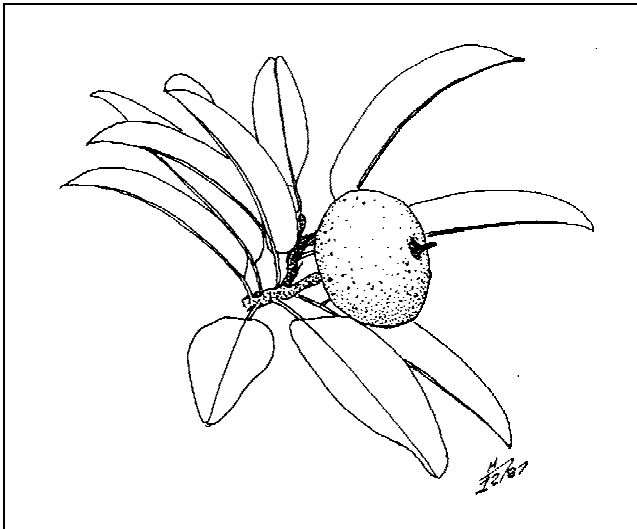


Figure 3. Fruit of Sapodilla.

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.

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

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

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.