Casasia clusiifolia: Seven Year Apple[1]

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Introduction

Seven year apple (*Casasia clusiifolia*) is an evergreen shrub or small tree, and is one of Florida's most exceptional native, salt-tolerant plants that naturally occurs in the coastal hammocks of south Florida and the Keys, as well as parts of the West Indies. This large shrub has a rounded growth habit and reaches a height of 20 feet and spread of 15 feet (Figure 1). The beautiful, glossy, leathery foliage is clustered near the branch tips (Figure 2). Foliage is obovate, evergreen, and 4 to 8 inches in length. The seven year apple has axillary clusters of white, pink-tipped flowers that emerge in the spring and early summer (Figure 3). These flowers are approximately 1-inch long and have a very sweet, heavy fragrance that attracts butterflies and moths. As this plant is dioecious, separate male and female plants are required in proximity to produce fruit. Seven year apple has large lemon-shaped fruits that may persist for more than a year (Figure 4). The common name of this plant, seven year apple, refers to the fruit's extended maturation period. The fruits are green when they first appear and gradually turn yellow and ripen in about one year. Yellow fruits then turn black and become wrinkled. The dark brown pulp inside the black fruits is edible but is filled with many seeds. This pulp is very appealing to the mockingbirds, and they hollow out the ripe fruits and leave the empty skins hanging on the plant. Seven year apple makes an excellent hedge or screen, with its dense, large, evergreen foliage. It may also be used as a border. This plant is suitable for coastal landscaping, as it is salt tolerant and storm surge resistant.



Figure 1. Full form—*Casasia clusiifolia*: seven year apple.
Credit: © Meg Teuber, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC)



Figure 2. Leaf—*Casasia clusiifolia*: seven year apple.
Credit: © Jordon Munizzi, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Casasia clusiifolia*: seven year apple. Credit: © Brian Finzel, some rights reserved (CC BY-SA) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Casasia clusiifolia*: seven year apple. Credit: © Stephen John Davies, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist

General Information

Scientific name: *Casasia clusiifolia*

Pronunciation: kuh-SAW-see-uh kloo-see-if-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): seven year apple

Family: *Rubaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)



Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 10B–11A; 11B included within planting zone but not pictured on map. Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

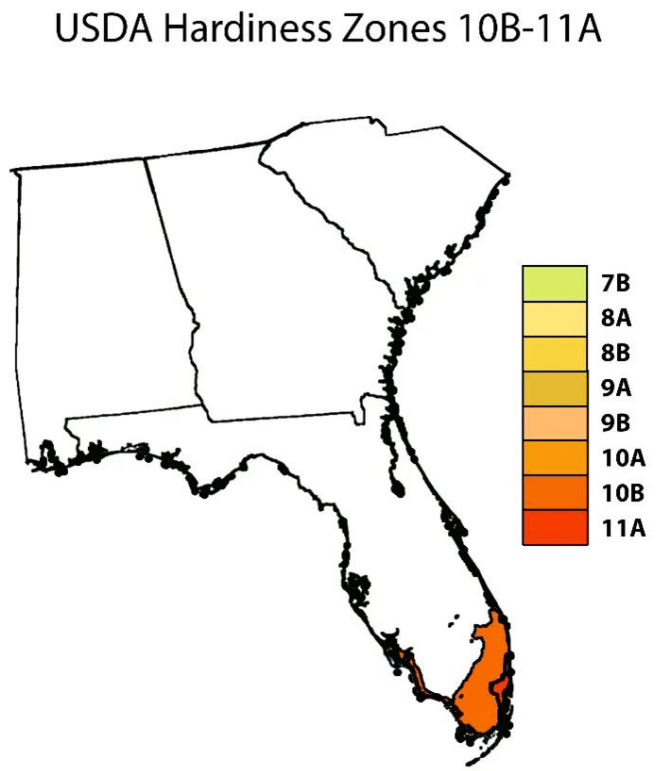


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 10B–11A; 11B included within planting zone but not pictured on map. Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: hedge; screen; border; coastal landscaping; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; specimen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100–200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

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

Description

Height: 8 to 20 feet

Spread: 8 to 15 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: revolute

Leaf shape: obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: 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 characteristic: showy; spring flowering; summer flowering; fragrant; flowers periodically throughout the year; dioecious

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: green; yellow; black; depends on maturity

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; attracts birds; slow maturation period

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun; plant grows in partial shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: good (tolerates aerosolized salt and spray; some storm surge tolerance)

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: evergreen foliage

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Seven year apple should be planted in a full sun or partial shade location in the landscape. It requires well-drained soil and is very drought and salt tolerant. The showy flowers and edible, wildlife-attracting fruit make this plant an interesting addition to the landscape. As this plant is dioecious, separate male and female plants are required in proximity for the female plant to produce fruit.

The seven year apple may be used in the same way that photinia or pittosporum is used in the landscape. Plant them on 4- to 5-foot centers to create a hedge or screen of medium-textured soft foliage. This plant is also useful to soften the corners of a commercial building. This plant is

generally too big for many residential landscapes unless they are regularly pruned. Forming a small, multi-trunk tree by removing lower branches as the plant grows keeps this plant within bounds to be used in the home landscape. Seven year apple can also serve as a wind break on the oceanfront.

Design Considerations

Seven-year apple is valued for its bold, sculptural texture: large, glossy, spoon-shaped leaves clustered at the ends of stout branches, creating an irregular, windswept tropical form. Fragrant, starry white flowers stand out against deep green foliage, and the large, persistent green-to-yellow fruit provides year-round visual weight.

Exceptionally tolerant of salt, wind, and drought, it excels as a focal point in coastal gardens, rockeries, or other exposed, dry sites. It can form a tough, informal screen or serve as a dramatic foundation plant against modern architecture. Its wild, sprawling character requires ample space and is unsuited for tidy, formal designs, though it can be pruned for density or trained into a small tree.

For companion plantings, soften its coarse texture with the fine blades of muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) or Fakahatchee grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*). Ground the plant and hide any leggy growth with a structural base of coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*) or silver saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens* 'Cinerea') or let sprawling groundcovers like dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) weave around it. To create a resilient coastal habitat, combine it with other tough natives like seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), necklace pod (*Sophora tomentosa*), and Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*).

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

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