

Illicium anisatum Japanese Anise Tree¹

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Introduction

Illicium anisatum is an upright, rounded, bushy shrub or small tree that attains a height of 10 to 15 feet. The foliage of this plant is exceptional. In contrast to *Illicium parviflorum* and *Illicium floridanum*, the evergreen leaves of *Illicium anisatum* are a lustrous medium to dark green color with undulate margins. All anise leaves smell a little like root beer when they are crushed. Leaves of anise tree are generally 2 to 4 inches long, a little smaller than those on the other two species. Many yellowish-white or greenish-white flowers, with up to 30 petals, are produced in spring. These axillary flowers are star-shaped and have no fragrance, but can be showy if you are close to the plant. They are produced in abundance in some years. The fruits of the anise tree are star-shaped follicles that eventually release dark brown seeds.

General Information

Scientific name: *Illicium anisatum*

Pronunciation: ill-LISS-ee-um an-niss-SAY-tum

Common name(s): Japanese anise tree

Family: *Illiciaceae*

Plant type: tree

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10 (Figure 4)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10: year round

Origin: not native to North America



Figure 1. Full Form - *Illicium anisatum*: Japanese Anise Tree
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

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Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: hedge; espalier; screen; foundation; border

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



Figure 2. Leaf - *Illicium anisatum*: Japanese Anise Tree
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Figure 3. Flower - *Illicium anisatum*: Japanese Anise Tree
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Description

Height: 10 to 15 feet

Spread: 8 to 15 feet

Plant habit: oval

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: fragrant

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular

Fruit length: 0.5 to 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk; not particularly showy

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

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

Use and Management

This plant is most useful as the base green mass in a shrub border. Its large size makes it well suited for creating a screen to maintain a visual and noise barrier. The anise tree is ideal for shady natural areas and may also be used for foundation plantings if you do not mind the regular clipping that will be needed to maintain it as a hedge. Some people have trained them into small trees for planting near a patio or deck.

Illicium anisatum is adaptable, growing in a full sun to mostly shaded location in the landscape and performs best on a moist, well-drained, rich soil. It is moderately tolerant of drought but has a low salt spray tolerance. Annual pruning may be necessary if one is attempting to maintain this plant as a shrub. Little fertilizer appears to be necessary to maintain good foliage color and growth in the landscape.

There is a white flowered form of the plant available at some garden centers. Propagate the anise tree by seed, semi-ripe cuttings, or by simple layering.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Mites and scales may be troublesome on occasion.