

# *Clusia rosea* 'Variegata': 'Variegata' Pitch Apple<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This wide-spreading, densely-foliated, rounded, 25- to 30-foot-tall, evergreen tree has a short trunk and broad, thickened, leathery leaves, reminiscent of Southern magnolia leaves. The leaves are striking with yellow and green marbled variegations. It is, in fact, greatly admired in Cuba and the Virgin Islands as an ornamental. Leaves can be written on with a fingernail. In summer, the showy, pink and white, 2- to 3-inch flowers appear at night and sometimes remain open all morning on overcast days. They appear near the branch tips and are followed by a fleshy, light green, poisonous fruit, 3-inches in diameter. These persistent fruits turn black when ripe and split open, revealing bright red seeds surrounded by a black, resinous material. The seeds are very attractive to birds and other wildlife and they germinate readily in the landscape and surrounding areas. The black material surrounding these seeds was once used to caulk the seams of boats, hence its common name, 'Pitch Apple.'

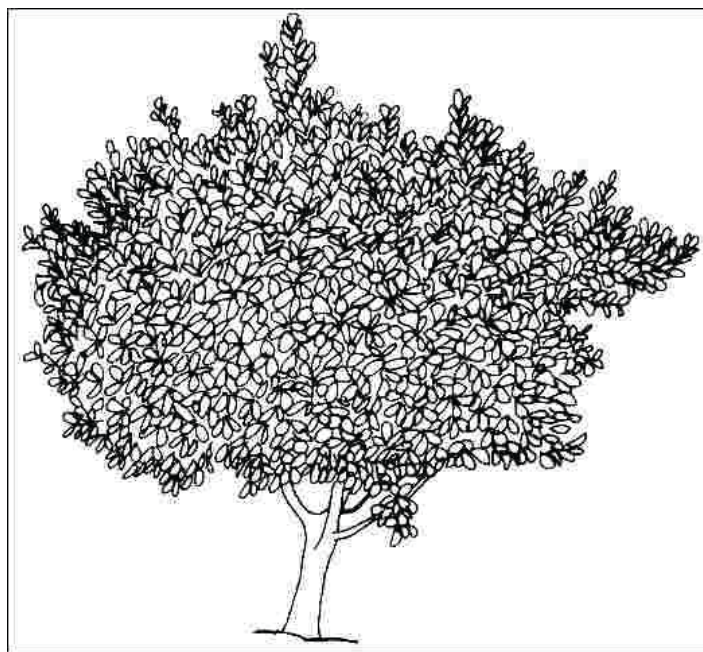


Figure 1. Middle-aged *Clusia rosea* 'Variegata': 'Variegata' pitch-apple.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Clusia rosea*

**Pronunciation:** KLOO-see-uh ROE-zee-uh

**Common name(s):** 'Variegata' pitch apple, 'Variegata' Florida clusia

**Family:** *Clusiaceae*

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**USDA hardiness zones:** 10A through 11 (Figure 2)

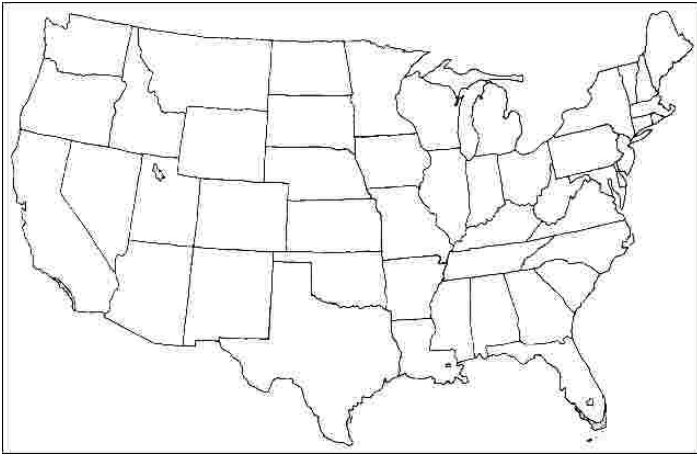


Figure 2. Range.

**Origin:** native to North America

**Invasive potential:** native cultivar

**Uses:** trained as a standard; reclamation; urban tolerant; street without sidewalk; screen; specimen; espalier; deck or patio; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; shade; highway median; hedge; container or planter

## Description

**Height:** 25 to 30 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** round, spreading

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Figure 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** obovate

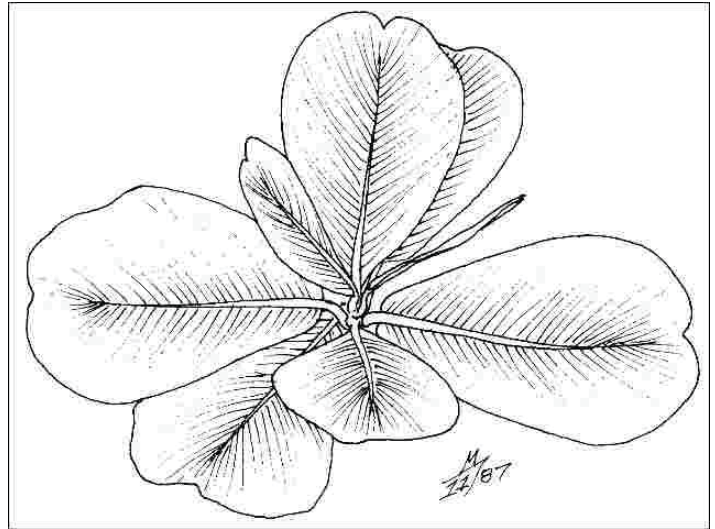


Figure 3. Foliage.

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen, evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches, 8 to 12 inches

**Leaf color:** variegated

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** pink, white/cream/gray

**Flower characteristics:** showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches, 3 to 6 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green, black

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts squirrels/mammals; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun, or partial shade, shade tolerant

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

## Use and Management

Growing well in full sun to dappled shade, pitch apple tolerates many different soil types but grows most rapidly on moist soils. It is quite tolerant of light, open sands and salt spray, making it ideal for seaside locations. Pitch apple is often used as a screen due to its low spreading habit and is ideal for espalier to cool building walls in the summer. Some maintenance is required to trim prop roots and aerial roots as they form from the trunk base and lower branches, or the tree could take over an area. Otherwise, it is a low-maintenance tree. With lower branches removed, it can make an attractive, small to moderately-sized street tree, although some people object to the falling fruits and thick slowly decomposing leaves. A patio can be kept cooler with a pitch apple which creates a dense shade. Plants should be watered well until established and trees develop rapidly.

Purchase trees which have been trained in the nursery to one central leader for street tree use. Those grown for specimen use with several upright trunks are not suited for streets, as vehicle clearance will be difficult to maintain and trees will be less durable.

Propagation is by cuttings.

## Pests

Scale.

## Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.