

***Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-Almond¹**

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Introduction

West Indian-almond is a 30 to 55-foot-tall, deciduous tree which forms a symmetrical, upright silhouette in youth with horizontal branches reaching 50 feet in width at maturity. The branches are arranged in obvious tiers, giving the tree a pagoda-like shape. As the tree grows older, the crown spreads and flattens on the top to form a wide-spreading vase shape. The large, 15-inch-long and six-inch-wide, shiny dark green, leathery leaves change to beautiful shades of red, yellow, and purple before dropping in winter. Due to their large size, these old leaves may be considered a nuisance to some people. The leaves are quickly replaced by new growth, so the tree is bare for only a short period of time. The inconspicuous, greenish-white, springtime blossoms appear in six-inch-long terminal clusters and are followed by the edible fruits. These drupes are 2 to 3-inches long and mature from green to yellow or red, or brown during the summer. The outside husk is corky fiber with an inner thin green flesh. The inside holds the edible, almond-like kernel. The fruit is high in tannic acid and this could stain cars, pavement and sidewalks. It also causes significant litter on the ground.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-almond

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General Information

Scientific name: *Terminalia catappa*

Pronunciation: ter-mih-NAIL-ee-uh kuh-TAP-uh

Common name(s): West Indian-almond, sea-almond, tropical-almond, India-almond

Family: *Combretaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: Caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South); Not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North and Central)

Uses: shade; highway median; specimen; street without sidewalk; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 55 feet

Spread: 30 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: pyramidal, spreading

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: broadly obovate

Leaf venation: brachidodrome, pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 15 inches

Leaf color: dark green and shiny on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: red, yellow, or purple

Fall characteristic: showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-almond

Flower

Flower color: pale green or white

Flower characteristics: not showy; star-shaped; emerges in terminal clusters on 2”–6” long racemes

Flowering: summer and fall



Figure 4. Flower—*Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-almond

Fruit

Fruit shape: elliptic

Fruit length: 2 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: firm but fleshy drupe

Fruit color: turns from green to red, yellow, or brown when ripe

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fruiting: summer



Figure 5. Fruit—*Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-almond

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: gray and smooth, becoming fissured with age

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: green, brown

Current year twig thickness: thick, very thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Terminalia catappa*: West Indian-almond

Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The tree may be best suited for planting along the coast as a park or shade tree providing dense shade. People may object to the large leaves and the fruit that falls from the tree if the tree is used as a street tree, and the tannic acid may be a problem near parked cars. Branches droop and require regular maintenance to keep them pruned to allow for vehicle clearance beneath the canopy. However, it would make a nice tree for a median or along a boulevard where this would cause less of a nuisance.

West Indian-almond should be grown in full sun on any well-drained soil. Plants are quite tolerant of wind, salt, and drought but do need protection from freezing temperatures. Trees perform best if mulched and regularly fertilized.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Thrips are a pest of this tree.

Diseases

Leaf spot disease is a problem with this tree.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.