PLANT FACT SHEET

# *Chrysophyllum cainito* L.

**GENUS** *Chrysophyllum* **FAMILY** Sapotaceae

**COMMON NAMES** Star apple, Caimito

## EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

**Edible parts:** Fruit, Seeds

The flesh of the fruit is eaten fresh when fully ripe. The skin has a gummy substance so the flesh of the fruit should be spooned out. The flesh of the fruit is sometimes added to salads and drinks. The fruit can be parboiled and also made into preserves.
The seeds are sometimes eaten in confectionary. An emulsion of the kernels can be made into a sweets.
Caution: The seeds contain a cyanogenic glucoside.

## DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree up to 12-25 m high. It spreads 4-8 m across. The stem is erect but the branches hang down. Leaves are small, hairy, shiny and dark green on top and red/yellow underneath. Young parts of the plant are hairy, with soft silky rust coloured hairs. The flowers are mauve and small. They occur in clusters scattered among the mature twigs. The fruit are smooth skinned and 5-10 cm across. Fruit are oval shaped, yellow at first and light purple when ripe. When the fruit is cut crossways the star shape can be seen. The fruit pulp is white and sweet. The flesh can be purple in some kinds. It contains up to 10 shiny dark seeds.

## HABITAT

A tropical plant. It suits the hot, tropical lowlands with medium to high rainfall. It is native to tropical America. They are suitable for damp districts probably below 400 m altitude. They are grown at Kerevat in Papua New Guinea. It is drought and frost tender. It suits well drained soils, in a protected sunny position. Humid atmosphere and high temperatures throughout the year, suit the tree best. It has been grown up to 1,000 m altitude in South India. Young trees need cold protection but mature trees can survive cool temperatures. In XTBG Yunnan. At ECHO. It suits hardiness zones 11-12.

## PRODUCTION

### Cultivation

Trees are grown from seeds. Seed can be stored for several months. Seed germinate well if planted fresh. Germination takes about 6 weeks. Trees grown from seed, give a variation in fruit quality and size. Fruit need to ripen on the tree. Trees are not normally pruned. Budding and grafting have been used. Cuttings will grow if taken from well ripened small shoots and grown in strong moist heat. Plants can be grown by layering. Trees are usually self-fertile.

### Harvesting and Seed Production

It is a slow growing tree. Trees planted from seed come into bearing in 5-9 years. Grafted trees bear in 4-5 years. Fruit mature in about 180 days. Yields of 70 kg or fruit per tree per year have been recorded. The fruit do not drop and must be picked. They can be stored for 3 weeks at cool temperatures.

## NOTES

The tree is often grown as an ornamental because of the attractive golden underside to the leaves. There are about 80-150 Chrysophyllum species. They are mostly in tropical America. There are 44 species in tropical America.

## PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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