



PLANT FACT SHEET

Manilkara zapota (L.) Van Royen

GENUS *Manilkara* FAMILY Sapotaceae

COMMON NAMES Sapodilla, Sapote

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Sap, Latex, Leaves, Gum

The fully ripe fruit are eaten. The fruit are eaten fresh. They can be used for drinks, jams or jellies. They can be dried, preserved, or used in custards, sherberts, ice cream, pies and muffins.

The unripe fruit can be pickled. The juice can be boiled into syrup or made into syrup or wine.

The bark contains a gummy substance (chicle) used for chewing gum. The very young leaves are eaten.

The very young shoots and leaves may be eaten, but older leaves contain an alkaloid poison.

CAUTION The seeds are hooked and can catch in the throat so should be removed.

DESCRIPTION

A medium sized evergreen tree up to 18 m tall. It can grow to 30 m in tropical regions. The leaves are 8-12 cm long by 2-4 cm wide. The leaves are green and shiny. The leaves tend to be clustered in spirals near the ends of twigs. The flowers are single and white in the axils of leaves. They are bell like and 1 cm across and produced on long stalks. The fruit has several smooth black shiny seeds. The fruit are normally in pairs and 5-8 cm across. It is rusty brown in colour. The fruit can be seedless or can have up to 3 to 12 hard shiny seeds inside. The seeds are flattened and about 2 cm long. The tree has a milky juice. There are several named cultivated varieties.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It suits the hot, humid tropical lowlands. It will grow in subtropical climates. It needs a warm climate above 18°C to 24°C. Tree can stand temperatures down to freezing for short periods of time. Frost will kill young trees but mature trees can tolerate reasonable frosts. Good year round rainfall is needed especially for young trees. It will probably grow up to 1000 m in the tropics but is better at lower altitudes. It can tolerate some salt in the soil. They need good fertile soil. It can grow in heavy clay soils. It can grow in acid soils. Young trees need extra fertiliser for good growth. It does best in sunny positions. It cannot tolerate waterlogged soils but can withstand drought. It can stand strong winds. It can grow in arid places. In Brisbane Botanical Gardens. At ECHO. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Trees can be grown from fresh seeds but they are not true to type. This has resulted in many varieties which vary in fruit shape and size. It is best to use grafted plants. Seed remain viable for several years. Better varieties should be grown by grafting or air-layering. Trees can be grown from cuttings of mature branches. Seedling

trees tend to be taller. Growing from cuttings is not easy. A spacing of 8-9 metres is suitable. Thinning of fruit is rarely undertaken as sap discolours other fruit. Topping of the tree can be done if the tree becomes too tall. Trees need little pruning.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees are slow growing. Seedling trees take about 8-10 years to commence bearing. Grafted trees bear when about 4-5 years old. Fruit takes about 4-6 months after flowering to mature. There can be several bunches of fruit throughout the year. The fruit should be harvested when fully ripe to avoid the sticky latex.

Often there are two crops each year. A well established 10 year old tree can produce 200-250 kg of fruit per year. Fruit need to be fully ripe. It is not easy to determine ripeness except for a slight colour change. Allowing fruit to fall ensures full maturity. The fully ripe fruit are eaten. Fruit weigh about 110 g. Fruit can be stored at 2°C for 6 weeks.

NOTES

There are about 75 *Manilkara* species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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