

SAPIUM SEBIFERUM (L.) ROXB.

Euphorbiaceae/Spurge Family

Common Names: Chinese tallow tree, popcorn tree

Synonymy: *Croton sebiferus* L., *Stillingia sebifera* Michx., *Triadica sebifera* (L.)
Small

Origin: Eastern Asia

Botanical Description: Deciduous tree to 16 m (52 ft), commonly to 10 m (33 ft). Sap milky. Leaves simple, alternate; blades entire, broadly ovate, 3-6 cm (1-2.5 in) wide, with broadly rounded bases and abruptly acuminate (tapering to a slender point) tips; petioles slender, 2-5 cm (1-2 in) long. Flowers small, yellow, borne on spikes to 20 cm (8 in) long, with 2-3 sepals (petals absent), 2-3 stamens or 3 styles (plants monoecious). Fruit a 3-lobed capsule, 1 cm (0.5 in) wide, turning brown and splitting open at maturity to reveal 3 dull white seeds, which remain attached for a time.

Ecological Significance: Considered a common agricultural weed in Taiwan, requiring constant effort and expense to hold at bay (Holm *et al.* 1979). Introduced repeatedly to the United States as an ornamental and potential oil crop species (Jones and McLeod 1989). Considered an invasive pest plant in the Carolinas since the 1970s. Has expanded its range on the United States Gulf Coast in low-lying areas, becoming dominant and spreading along roadside ditches and into areas where the soil stays wet (Cameron and LaPoint 1978). Also thrives in upland, well-drained areas near human habitation and in undisturbed areas such as closed canopy forests, in bottomland hardwood forests, shores of waterbodies, and sometimes on floating islands (Godfrey 1988). Survives in both poorly drained freshwater and saline soils as well (Scheld and Cowles 1981). Tends to take over large areas (Bonner 1974).

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Flowers

CHINESE TALLOW TREE

Distribution: Naturalized in outer coastal plain of South Carolina and adjacent North Carolina, also in Richmond County, North Carolina (Radford *et al.* 1968), south through Florida, and west to eastern Texas (Godfrey 1988). Found throughout Florida south to Manatee County on the Gulf coast and St. Lucie County on the Atlantic coast (Jubinsky 1993). Has potential range through southern Florida to the upper Florida Keys (Broschat and Meerow 1991). Recently found naturalized in Dade County (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995), and by 1996 (Jubinsky and Anderson), recorded as naturalized in 57% of Florida's counties.

Life History: Early growth rate very rapid with flowering and fruiting from the time the tree is about 1 m (3.3 ft) tall. Also suckers from stumps. Flowers in spring (Broschat and Meerow 1991), with fruit ripening August to November. Seeds primarily dispersed by birds and water (Jubinsky 1993).

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Persisting white seeds

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In Lake Jessup conservation area