Chiku

Manilkara zapota

Code: TREE-E905AEFE87C8431 **Location:** XIM University Campus **Local / Vernacular name:** ସଫେଟା

Botanical Details

Leaf habit: Evergreen Flowers / Fruits: small, bell-like white flowers; fruit is a brown, scurfy-skinned berry with sweet, grainy, pear-like flesh and black, shiny seeds. Native range: Native to Southern Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean; widely cultivated and naturalized throughout the tropics, particularly in India, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Uses & Importance

Ecological: Manilkara zapota is a cornerstone species in tropical agroforestry due to its exceptional resilience and ability to flourish in marginalized environments. It is remarkably drought-resistant and capable of thriving in poor, sandy, or alkaline soils where many other fruit-bearing trees would fail. This adaptability makes it a vital tool for reclaiming degraded lands and providing a stable green cover in arid regions. Beyond its hardiness, the tree functions as a critical year-round food hub for forest and urban wildlife. Its sweet, calorie-dense fruits are a primary attraction for various avian species, fruit bats, and mammals such as monkeys, who act as the tree’s main seed dispersers. The evergreen canopy provides a permanent sanctuary and nesting site for birds, while the small, nectar-rich flowers support local populations of bees and other pollinators. By maintaining its foliage throughout the year, it contributes significantly to carbon sequestration and local temperature regulation, acting as a "buffer" species that protects the soil from the scorching tropical sun and prevents nutrient leaching during heavy rains.

Medicinal: In traditional medicine systems, the Chiku tree is valued for its high concentration of tannins and bioactive polyphenols. The bark is widely used as a decoction to treat chronic diarrhea and dysentery, acting as a potent astringent to soothe the gastrointestinal tract. The leaves possess significant anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties; they are often boiled into a tea to treat respiratory ailments such as coughs and colds. One of the most unique aspects of the tree is its "chicle" or milky latex, which has historically been used in folk medicine as a base for treating toothaches and skin inflammations. Modern research has highlighted the fruit's rich dietary fiber and tannin content, which provides a natural laxative effect while also exhibiting anti-bacterial and anti-parasitic activities. The seeds contain certain alkaloids that are utilized in traditional crushed forms as a diuretic, although they must be used with caution. The high Vitamin A and C content in the fruit also contributes to its role as a natural immune booster and an aid in maintaining skin and ocular health. Its combined ability to treat internal digestive issues and external skin irritations makes it a fundamental part of the tropical herbal pharmacopeia.

Cultural: The Chiku tree holds a fascinating place in history, particularly as the original source of chicle, the natural latex used by the Aztecs and Mayans as the foundation for the world's first chewing gum. This historical legacy links

the tree deeply to the indigenous cultures of Central America and Mexico, where it was revered as a source of both sustenance and trade. In South Asia, the Chiku has become a beloved symbol of backyard abundance; it is often the first tree planted in a new garden, representing sweetness, longevity, and "Sthirta" (stability). Culturally, the fruit is synonymous with seasonal festivities and is a staple in religious offerings and communal feasts due to its intensely sweet, malty flavor. In many tropical societies, the tree is associated with patience and endurance because it grows slowly but lives for centuries, often becoming a landmark for local communities. The durable, high-density wood of the Manilkara species is traditionally used to craft heavyduty items and architectural supports in temples, symbolizing strength. From its ancient roots in Mayan forests to its modern status as a beloved household fruit in India, the Chiku stands as a bridge between ancient civilizations and contemporary tropical life, celebrated for its quiet resilience and the simple joy of its harvest.

Location

GPS: 20.15860192, 85.76535449

Directions: https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&travelmode=walking&destination=20.15860192%2C85.76535449