



Confusing Clusia

(Author's Note: This is the twentieth in a series of articles by members of the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee dealing with vegetative matters of concern to island residents. Members of the Vegetation Committee are Sanibel residents appointed by City Council for one-year terms. To be considered for appointment, contact the City Manager's Office at (239) 472-3700.)

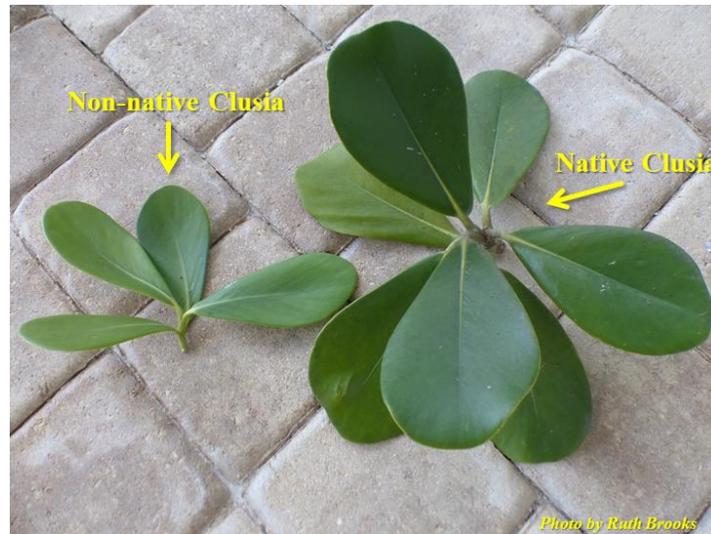
There are 300+ species of Clusia in the world. Clusia is often referred to as the Autograph Tree because any etching will remain on the leaf until it falls or Pitch Apple after the black material surrounding the seeds, which was used to caulk the seams of boats. Clusia is a low maintenance plant that has thick, leathery leaves and a low branching pattern which makes it a nice choice for a hedge. It's also drought and salt tolerant with few pests, making a perfect plant for Sanibel. Only one species however, *Clusia rosea*, is native to Florida.



Clusia rosea has the biggest leaves and a unique fruit. Consideration must be made when planting this native species because it is temperature sensitive below 35 degrees. In the past, cold fronts on Sanibel have led to die-offs of these trees.



Several non-native species of *Clusia* have notably smaller leaves. Their flowers and fruits are not easily seen on Sanibel, perhaps because they are kept as hedges and trimmed regularly, which discourages flower development. They also have the leathery, paddle-shaped leaves common to the *Clusia* genus. These dwarf or ‘small leafed’ varieties have been planted with the misunderstanding that they are native plants.



Why is this important to know? As a community we have defined Sanibel, as a ‘barrier island sanctuary, living in harmony with the island’s wildlife.’ The Sanibel community also decided we wanted ‘our development to reflect the predominance of natural conditions and characteristics’ (Sanibel Vision Statement) Therefore, when any development or substantial redevelopment occurs on the island, the City of Sanibel Land Development Code requires that 75 % of the plants (in three categories: trees, shrubs, and groundcovers) on the property be native.

If a *Clusia* hedge is planted with a non-native species of *Clusia*, it is required that enough native trees and shrubs be present on the property to meet the 75% native requirement. If this is not the case, it would require the installation of additional native trees to meet the required native to exotic ratio. In other words, three native trees would have to be planted for every one exotic *Clusia*. This may be a problem, depending on the size of the property.



There are many native plants that make wonderful hedges including Coco Plum, Florida Privet, Walter's Viburnum and Simpson's Stopper. If a native hedge is planted not only do you have plants that are attractive to wildlife and need no watering or fertilizing. By choosing to go native, you add to the goal of preserving our community as a sanctuary island.

Where can I learn more about native plants on Sanibel? The Vegetation Committee hosts free plant walks from November to April at City Hall to view and discuss the use of native plants. Everyone and their questions are welcome!

Go native with the right help!

To view pictures of the Invasive Exotic Plants "Worst of the Worst" or the City's "The Alien Invasion" brochure, visit the City's website at <http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources/Vegetation-Information/Exotic-Vegetation/Other-Invasive-Exotic-Vegetation> or contact the City's Natural Resources Department at 472-3700.

To read other Vegetation Committee articles in this series please visit the City of Sanibel's Natural Resources Department website: <http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources>