

Tallowtree, Popcorn tree

TREES



June

T. Bodner



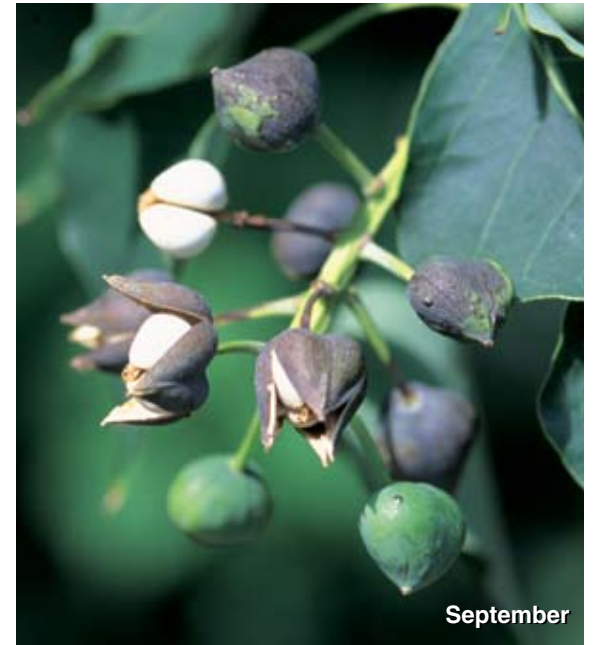
September



December



September



September



November

F. Nation

***Triadica sebifera* (L.) Small TRSE6**

Synonym: Chinese tallowtree, *Sapium sebiferum* (L.) Roxb.

Plant. Deciduous tree to 60 feet (18 m) in height and 3 feet (90 cm) in diameter, with heart-shaped leaves, dangling yellowish spikes in spring yielding small clusters of three-lobed fruit that split to reveal popcorn-like seeds in fall and winter.

Stem. Terminal clusters of flowers and fruits result in whorled branching from lateral buds below fruit clusters. Twigs lime green turning gray with scattered brownish dots (lenticels) later becoming striations. Numerous semicircular leaf scars becoming raised with age. Bark light gray and fissured. Sap milky.

Leaves. Alternately whorled, distinctively heart-shaped with a rounded wide-angled base and a short or long attenuate tip. Blades 2 to 3 inches (5 to 8 cm) long and 1.5 to 2.5 inches (4 to 6 cm) wide. Dark-green with light-green mid- and lateral veins and turning yellow to red in fall. Hairless, lime-green petioles 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 8 cm) with two tiny glands on upper side of juncture between blade and petiole (requires magnification).

Flowers. April to June. Slender, drooping spikes to 8 inches (20 cm) long of tiny flowers. Yellowish-green sepals but no petals. Female flowers at base and males along the spike.

Fruit and seeds. August to January. Small terminal clusters of three-lobed capsules (occasionally four to five lobed), each 0.5 to 0.75 inch (1.2 to 2 cm) across. Dark green in summer becoming black and splitting to reveal three white-wax coated seeds 0.3 inch (0.8 cm) long and 0.2 inch (0.5 cm) wide. Resemble popcorn and remain attached until winter.

Ecology. Invades stream banks, riverbanks, and wet areas like ditches as well as upland sites. Thrives in both freshwater and saline soils. Shade tolerant, flood tolerant, and allelopathic. Increasing widely through ornamental plantings. Spreading by bird- and water-dispersed seeds and colonizing by prolific surface root sprouts.

Resembles cottonwoods, *Populus* spp., which have wavy margined leaves and flaking bark.

History and use. Introduced from China to South Carolina in the 1700s and then in significant numbers to the gulf coast in the early 1900s. Plantings for seed oil recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture during 1920 to 1940. Ornamentals still sold and planted. Waxy seeds traditionally used to make candles. Honey plant for beekeeping.

States with suspected infestations are shown in gray.

**Tallowtree, Popcorn tree****0994**