

Gopher apple

(*Licania michauxii*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Gopher apple is a hardy, low-growing, woody groundcover that occurs naturally in sandhills, pine and scrubby flatwoods, scrub, coastal dunes and pine rocklands. It typically blooms spring through summer but may bloom year-round, attracting a plethora of pollinators. Its fruits appear in late summer. They are edible to humans (although nearly tasteless) and other animals but it is a preferred food of gopher tortoises. The plant is often confused with Runner oak (*Quercus pumila*), which has a similar growth habit and is found in similar habitats.

Gopher apple's flowers are small, creamy white and born in erect, terminal cymes. Leaves are leathery, stiff and oblong with fine but obvious venation. They can grow up to 4 inches long and are alternately arranged. Fruits are white drupes with a rosy blush, ovoid to ellipsoid in shape, and about 1 inch long or longer.

The species epithet *michauxii* pays homage to French botanist and explorer André Michaux (1746–1802), who is most noted for his study of North American flora. Some sources assign the botanical name *Geobalanus oblongifolius*.

Family: Chrysobalanaceae (Cocoplum family)

Native range: Nearly throughout Florida

To see where natural populations of Gopher apple have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–11

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: up to 1' tall

Propagation: Seed

Garden tips: Gopher apple will spread and form colonies by way of underground rhizomes. It works well as a groundcover and can help stabilize dry, sandy soils. It is drought tolerant and fire adapted.

Gopher apple plants are often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.



Photo by Chris Waltz