

## ***Chionanthus retusus*: Chinese Fringetree<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

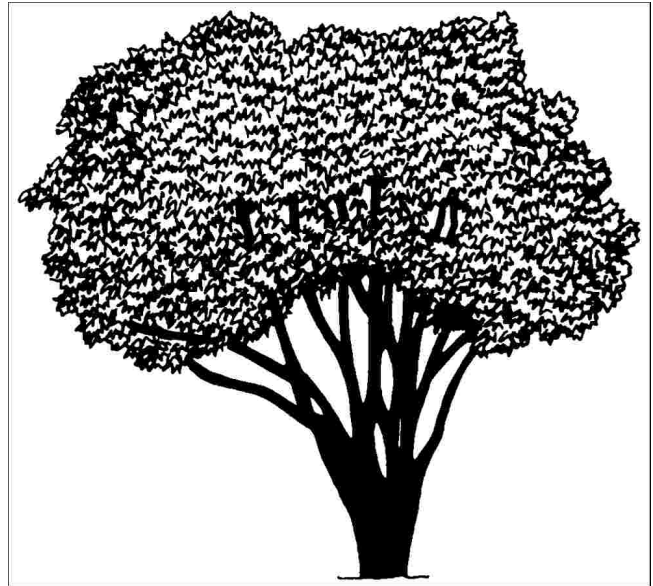
It is hard to think of a more beautiful, small, 20-foot-tall tree than Chinese Fringetree when it is in full bloom. The pure white, fragrant flowers, emerging just as the dogwood flowers fade, hang in four-inch-long, spectacular terminal panicles which appear to cover the tree with snowy white cotton for two to three weeks. Flowers emerge at the terminal end of the spring shoot growth flush. This differs from the native Fringetree which flowers before leaves emerge. As with other white-flowered trees, Chinese Fringetree looks best when viewed against a dark background. Female plants develop purple/blue fruits which are highly prized by many birds. Fall color is yellow in northern climates, but is often an unnoticed brown in the south, with many leaves dropping to the ground a blackened green. The flowers can be forced into early bloom indoors.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Chionanthus retusus*

**Pronunciation:** kye-oh-NANTH-us ree-TOO-sus

**Common name(s):** Chinese Fringetree



**Figure 1.** Mature *Chionanthus retusus*: Chinese Fringetree

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5B through 9B (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** sidewalk cutout (tree pit); parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot

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island > 200 sq ft; specimen; deck or patio;  
street without sidewalk; container or  
planter; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn  
4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway  
median

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out  
of the region to find the tree

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire



Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 15 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** round, vase

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray

**Flower characteristics:** very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round, oval

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch, .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** purple, blue

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown, gray

**Current year twig thickness:** medium, thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

### Culture

**Light requirement:** partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant, full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; occasionally wet; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** unknown

### Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

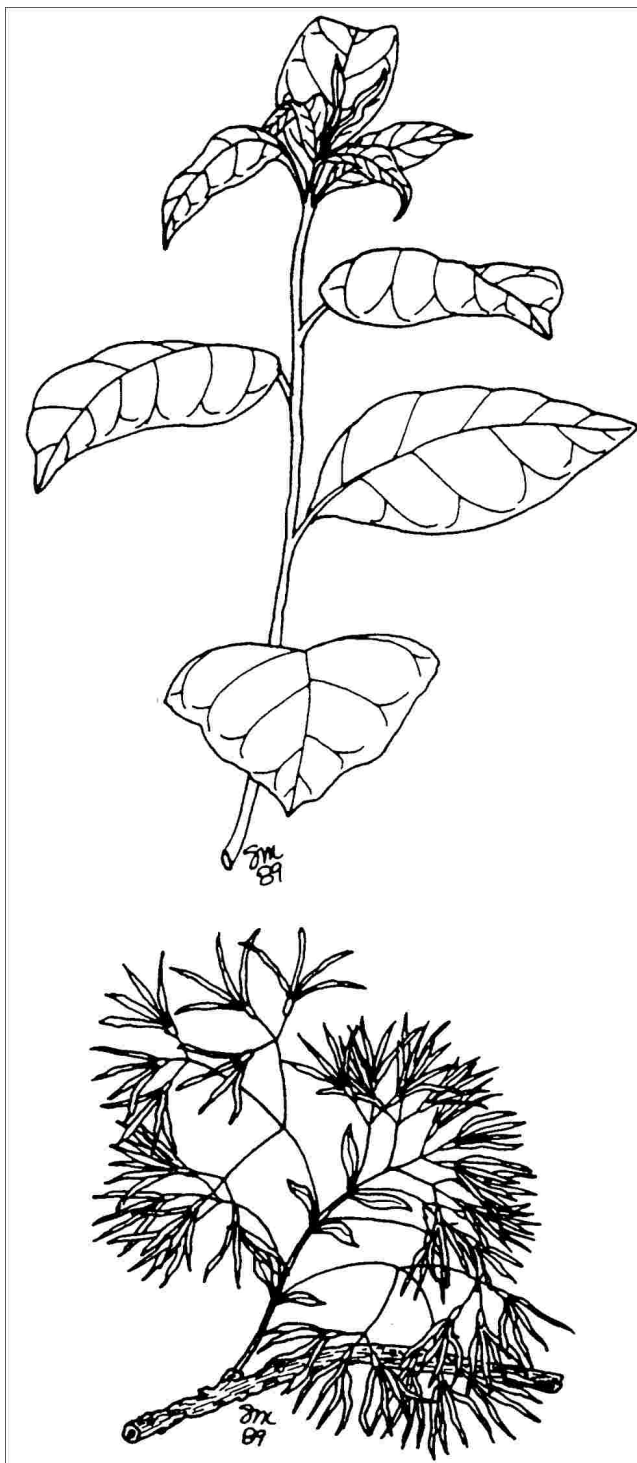


Figure 3. Foliage

## Use and Management

It forms a round ball if left unpruned but can be trained into a small tree with lower branches removed. It is naturally multitrunked and is usually found this way in nurseries but can be trained into a

small, single-trunked specimen. It is probably one of the finest accents available in the nursery trade! It makes the perfect patio tree, or can be planted along streets if provided with occasional summer irrigation. Although reportedly difficult to transplant, Chinese Fringetree can be successfully moved quite easily with proper care. It is usually grown and sold in containers.

Chinese Fringetree looks best in a sunny spot sheltered from wind. The tree appears more attractive in the deep south when grown with several hours of shade but blooms best in full sun, on moist, acid soil, and will gladly grow in even wet soils. Chinese Fringetree grows very slowly, usually 4 to 10 inches per year, but can grow a foot per year if given rich, moist soil and plenty of fertilizer. Fringetree tolerates moderate drought but looks best if irrigated occasionally during extended summer drought.

Propagation is by seed, cuttings, or layering. A number of horticulturists have figured out how to reliably germinate *Chionanthus virginicus*. Perhaps the techniques apply to the Chinese Fringetree.

### **Pests**

It is generally pest free.

Occasionally mites will infest the foliage.

### **Diseases**

It is generally disease free.

Leaf spots can be caused by several genera of fungi. Most years, the leaf spots are not a problem and there is no cause for control.

Powdery mildews of different genera may attack Chinese Fringetree.

Stem canker can cause premature defoliation.