

# *Melia azedarach*: Chinaberry<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Chinaberry is a round, deciduous, shade tree, reaching 30 to 40 feet at maturity and growing five to 10 feet during the first and second year after seed germination. Growth slows as the tree reaches 15 or 20 feet tall. It is successfully grown in a wide variety of situations, including alkaline soil where other trees might fail. Truly an urban survivor, Chinaberry has become naturalized in much of the south.

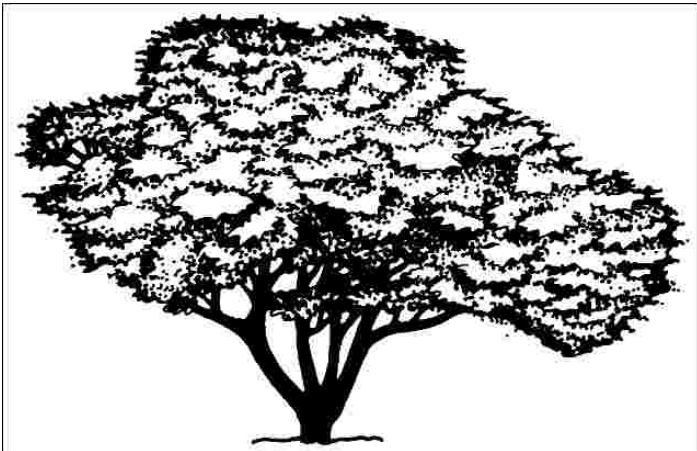


Figure 1. Mature *Melia azedarach*: Chinaberry

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Melia azedarach*

**Pronunciation:** MEEL-ee-uh uh-ZEE-duh-rack

**Common name(s):** Chinaberry

**Family:** *Meliaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7A through 10B (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** According to the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox *et al.* 2005), *Melia azedarach* (chinaberry) is: invasive and not recommended for use in the northern and central zones of Florida (but to see if any exceptions for specified and limited use have been approved since publication, check the Conclusions table at: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment>); may be used with caution in southern Florida, but should be managed to prevent its escape(counties are listed by zone at: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment>).

**Uses:** urban tolerant

**Availability:** not native to North America

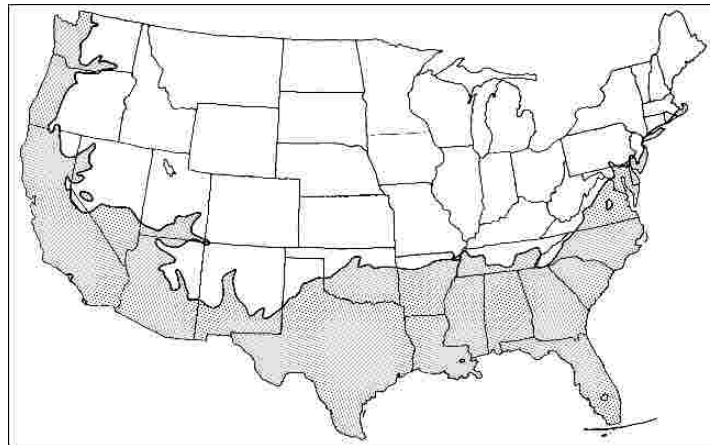


Figure 2. Range

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

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## Description

**Height:** 30 to 40 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** round

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** bipinnately compound, odd-pinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** serrate, lobed, incised

**Leaf shape:** ovate, elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** lavender

**Flower characteristics:** not showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** yellow

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

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** very thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

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

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

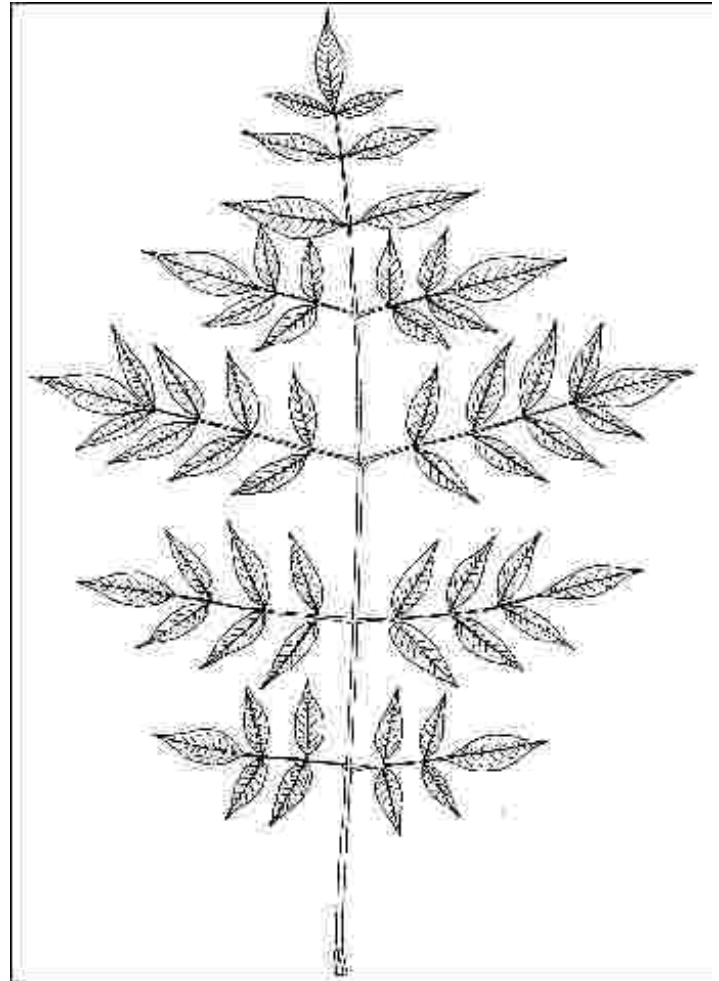


Figure 3. Foliage

## Use and Management

The clusters of lilac flowers are fragrant in the evening but are often hidden by the emerging foliage. The leaves turn a vivid yellow for a short time in the fall. The golden yellow fruit is quite attractive as it persists on the tree during the fall and winter. When eaten in quantities, the fruit is poisonous to people but not to birds. The wood is very brittle but it has been used in cabinet making.

Chinaberry is considered a “weed” tree in the southeastern U.S. and so it is not usually available from nurseries. It is killed back to the ground in the northern end of its range and is often seen as a several-year-old sprout. Many people despise the tree because it has taken over waste areas and

other disturbed soil areas, and has naturalized over large areas of the south. It grows anywhere in any soil except wet soil. But with proper pruning to create a well-formed trunk and branch structure, the plant could improve its reputation. If you have one and would like to increase its life-span, prune to open up the crown to encourage development of a few well-spaced major limbs. You will not find anyone recommending planting this tree but fine examples of the tree can be found growing in the worst soil.

Propagation is from seed or root cuttings.

The cultivar 'Umbracultiformis' has a dome-like form and could be the plant seen commonly in some wild stands. It is often sold as Texas Umbrella-Tree. It would be nice to find a fruitless selection.

## **Pests and Diseases**

Scale, whitefly and sooty mold infest Chinaberry.

Leaf spot causes premature defoliation.