

## ***Pistacia chinensis*: Chinese Pistache<sup>1</sup>**

---

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

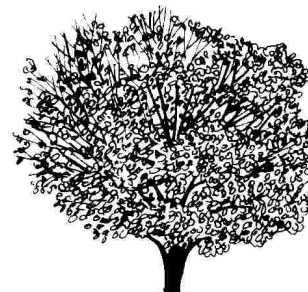
### **Introduction**

Finely divided, lustrous, dark green foliage, bright red fruit (on female trees) ripening to dark blue, peeling, attractive bark, and wonderful fall colors combine to make Chinese Pistache an outstanding specimen, shade, or street tree. Capable of reaching 60 feet in height with a 25 to 35-foot spread, Chinese Pistache is usually seen at 25 to 35 feet in height with an oval, rounded canopy and light, open branching creating light shade. Branches form a vase-shape which is particularly evident during the winter. Lower branches often droop to the ground with time, forming a wonderfully spreading crown. Older, more mature trees become more dense and uniformly-shaped. Young trees are asymmetrical and a bit awkward-looking unless properly pruned in the nursery. For this reason, it has not been widely planted but should be due its adaptability to urban soils.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Pistacia chinensis*

**Pronunciation:** piss-TAY-shee-uh chih-NEN-sis



**Figure 1.** Middle-aged *Pistacia chinensis*: Chinese Pistache

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

**Family:** *Anacardiaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 6B through 9B (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** reclamation; deck or patio; shade; specimen; street without sidewalk; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median

---

1. This document is ENH641, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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

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



Figure 2. Range

**Description**

**Height:** 25 to 35 feet

**Spread:** 25 to 35 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** oval, round, vase, spreading

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

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

**Leaf type:** even-pinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** lanceolate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

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

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** red, orange

**Fall characteristic:** showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** red

**Flower characteristics:** showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval, round

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

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** red, green, blue

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** 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:** none

### Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** yes

**Outstanding tree:** yes

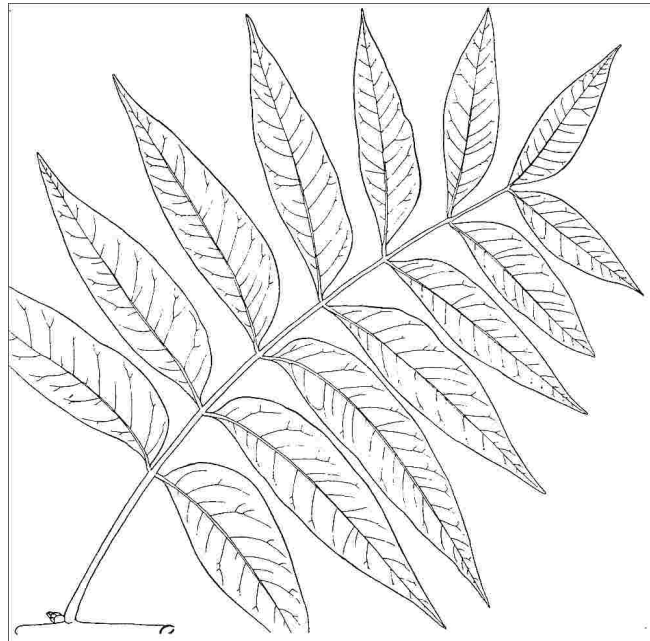
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

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

### Use and Management

The wood is extremely durable and the outer, grey-brown, fissured bark flakes off to reveal the attractive, salmon red or orange inner bark. The colorful red-orange to pink fruits appear in large panicles and are quite showy in late summer and autumn in USDA hardiness zones 8 and 9 but do not cause a significant litter problem. Fall color is



**Figure 3.** Foliage

reliably bright red or orange in USDA hardiness zone 8 and colder areas and makes one of the most brilliant shows of any tree, but fall color is less reliable in warmer climates. This is one of the last trees to color in the fall, extending the fall color show in many parts of the south into November.

The tree needs special pruning and training in the early years to create branches in desirable places along the trunk. It often grows with few branches, or with branches clustered at one point on the trunk, if it was topped in the nursery. To train an unbranched young sapling, prune the top to force development of several branches. Pick one to be the trunk, another to be a branch and remove the rest. Allow the tree to grow taller and again top the unbranched trunk 18 to 24 inches above the first pruning cut to force branch development there. Build the tree in this fashion until a desirable structure with well spaced branches is achieved.

This is certainly an underutilized urban tree. It has merit for wider use in urban street tree plantings and in other adverse sites due to its drought tolerance, adaptability, moderate size, and wonderful form and fall color. It is hard to go wrong with Chinese Pistache in all areas within its range. Its range is occasionally extended to hardiness zone 6a.

Chinese Pistache grows quickly in full sun to partial shade on moderately fertile, well-drained soils and will withstand heat and drought extremely well. The crown is quite round and symmetrical on older specimens when grown in full sun but becomes misshapen in too much shade - best for full sun areas. Grows in clay, loam, or sand in a wide range of soil pH.

Chinese Pistache is used as the understock on which the commercial pistachio nut ( *Pistacia vera* ) is grafted. The cultivar `Keith Davey' has outstanding autumn color.

Propagation is by seed.

### **Pests**

No pests are of major concern. This tree is about as pest-free as any tree.

### **Diseases**

Verticillium wilts and oak root fungus occasionally affect Chinese Pistache.