**Introduction**

Chinaberry is a round, deciduous, shade tree, reaching 30 to 40 feet at maturity and growing 5 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](image)

**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 UF/IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida’s Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005), *Melia azedorach* (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](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](http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment)).  
**Uses:** urban tolerant  
**Availability:** not native to North America

![Figure 2. Range](image)
**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

**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.