

Cinnamomum camphora: Camphor-Tree¹

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Introduction

This large, round-canopied, evergreen tree has broad, large-diameter, unusually strong branches and can reach 70 feet in height with a broader spread but is usually 40 to 50 feet with a 50 to 70-foot spread. The glossy green, thin but leathery leaves give off a camphor aroma when crushed and create dense shade. The stems and bark on young branches of Camphor-tree are bright green, tinged with red when young, maturing into a dark grey-brown, rugged-looking trunk which appears almost black when wet from rain. Trunk and branch structure on older trees appear similar to mature live oaks. The inconspicuous, tiny, yellow flowers are followed by a profusion of small, black berries which can become an annoyance on walks and driveways because they are messy but are quite attractive to wildlife. Fruits will stain cars. Some occasionally germinate below the tree, but this is not nearly as much of a problem as some other trees. Birds can also carry the seed to remote areas where it will occasionally germinate. The leaves, twigs, and wood are the commercial source of camphor. The dried bark of *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* yields cinnamon.

Common name(s): camphor-tree

Family: *Lauraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to eastern Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: invasive and not recommended (North and Central); caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South)

Uses: screen; shade; urban tolerant



Figure 1. Full Form—*Cinnamomum camphora*: camphor-tree

General Information

Scientific name: *Cinnamomum camphora*

Pronunciation: sin-uh-MOE-mum kam-FOR-uh

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 50 to 70 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate, obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen, fragrant when crushed

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: dark green and shiny on top, glaucous and silvery underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: greenish white

Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges in clusters on panicles

Flowering: spring

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ½ inch

Fruit covering: fleshy drupe

Fruit color: green to black

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem



Figure 3. Leaf—*Cinnamomum camphora*: camphor-tree



Figure 4. Flower—*Cinnamomum camphora*: camphor-tree



Figure 5. Fruit—*Cinnamomum camphora*: camphor-tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: brown to gray, becoming increasingly furrowed and rigid with age

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thin, medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Cinnamomum camphora*: camphor-tree

Credits: Gritta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Too big for all but the largest spaces, Camphor-tree is ideal when used as a shade tree for parks or large landscapes. Use along streets should be tempered because messy fruits drop on sidewalks and cars. It might be considered for boulevard planting where cars do not park. Prune to develop major branches, space 18 to 30 inches apart along a central trunk to develop good structure. Do not allow major branches to grow from the same spot on the trunk and avoid upright, multi-trunked trees. It may be difficult to maintain a lawn beneath the dense shade of Camphor-trees and a shade-tolerant groundcover may better suit the purpose. The trunk on older specimens grows to six feet or more in diameter and is quite picturesque. Allow plenty of room for proper development above and below ground. Shallow roots can be a nuisance. Has escaped cultivation in some areas.

Growing in full sun to partial shade, Camphor-Tree is amenable to a variety of soils, will grow but often develops minor element deficiencies on alkaline soils. Camphor-Tree is highly tolerant of urban conditions but will not tolerate water-logged soils. It is adapted to grow along the coast exposed to some sea salt.

The cultivar 'Monum' has larger, richer green foliage.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Scales and mites are common problems on Camphor-Trees. Seeds can germinate easily in the landscape but this is usually a minor problem. Has escaped cultivation in Florida, Louisiana, and parts of coastal Texas, so use it (if at all) with caution.

Diseases

Camphor-Tree is subject to a root rot, especially in poorly-drained soils.

References

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