

# *Litchi chinensis*: Lychee<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This attractive fruit tree has particularly handsome, dark green, glossy, evergreen leaves, five to eight inches long, and forms a compact, round-headed canopy. New leaves are an attractive bronze red. Lychee trees can eventually reach 30 to 50-feet in height with a 30 to 50-foot spread but will reach about 30 feet tall 30-years after planting in a landscape creating a wonderful shade, framing, or specimen tree. Small, greenish white to yellow flowers appear in drooping, 1 to 2 ½-foot-long panicles in early spring and are followed by clusters of delicious, 1 ½-inch-diameter fruit in late June and July. When ripe, the warty outer surface of the fruit turns strawberry red and becomes brittle. Easily peeled, the interior sweet, juicy, white flesh surrounds a single, large, glossy brown seed. The trees are quite decorative when laden with fruit. Consider locating the tree in the backyard if you are planting on a residential lot. This will prevent passerby's from helping themselves to the delectable fruit.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Litchi chinensis*

**Pronunciation:** LEE-chee chih-NEN-sis

**Common name(s):** lychee

**Family:** Sapindaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10A through 11 (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to southern China

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

**Uses:** hedge; fruit; specimen; screen; container or planter; deck or patio



Figure 1. Full Form - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
Credits: UF/IFAS

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Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 30 to 50 feet  
**Spread:** 30 to 50 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical  
**Crown shape:** round, spreading  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound; made up of 4-8 leaflets  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** elliptic to lanceolate



Figure 3. Leaf - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
 Credits: UF/IFAS

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen, evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 5 to 8 inches; leaflets are 2 to 3 inches

**Leaf color:** emerge bronze red, become dark green and shiny on top and grayish green underneath

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** greenish white to yellow

**Flower characteristics:** showy; emerges in clusters on 1-2 ½' long, terminal panicles

**Flowering:** spring



Figure 4. Flower - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
 Credits: UF/IFAS

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round to heart-shaped

**Fruit length:** 1 ½ inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy drupe; warty outer skin

**Fruit color:** strawberry red

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

**Fruiting:** summer





Figure 5. Fruit, Immature - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
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Figure 6. Fruit - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
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## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

**Bark:** gray and smooth

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown



Figure 7. Bark - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee  
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** none

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

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

## Use and Management

The tree may be located near a patio, in a shrub border, or as an accent in the lawn. The thick canopy also makes it well-suited as a screen. Spaced 20 to 30 feet apart, they make a nice median or boulevard tree.

Easily grown in full sun on deep, fertile, well-drained soil, lychee should be located where it can be protected from strong winds. The dense canopy can catch the wind and the tree can topple over in strong wind. Proper thinning can help prevent this. Plants should receive regular watering and fertilization, as iron deficiency can show in alkaline soil.

Several named cultivars are available for best fruit production: 'Brewster', 'Mauritius', 'Sweet Cliff', 'Kate Sessions', and 'Kwai Mi'.

Propagation is by air-layering.

## Pests

Scales.

## Diseases

Mushroom root rot can be a problem on soils where oaks were grown.

## Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.