

Litchi chinensis: Lychee¹

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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 1/2-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

- 1. This document is ENH-523, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication.
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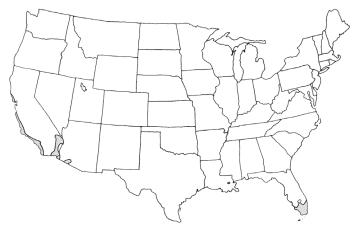


Figure 2. Range

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

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Figure 5. Fruit, Immature - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 6. Fruit - *Litchi chinensis*: lychee Credits: UF/IFAS

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

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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.

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