



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

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

## INTRODUCTION

This attractive fruit tree has particularly handsome, dark green, glossy, evergreen leaves, three to six inches long, and forms a compact, round-headed canopy (Fig. 1). New leaves are an attractive bronze-red. Lychee trees can eventually reach 40 to 50 feet in height with a 20-foot spread but will reach about 30 feet tall 30-years after planing in a landscape creating a wonderful shade, framing, or specimen tree. Small, yellow flowers appear in drooping, foot-long panicles in early spring and are followed by clusters of delicious, 1.5-inch-diameter fruit in late June and July. When ripe, the warty outer surface of the fruit turns bright 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 passerbys 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:** 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; fruit tree; hedge; near a deck or patio; screen; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

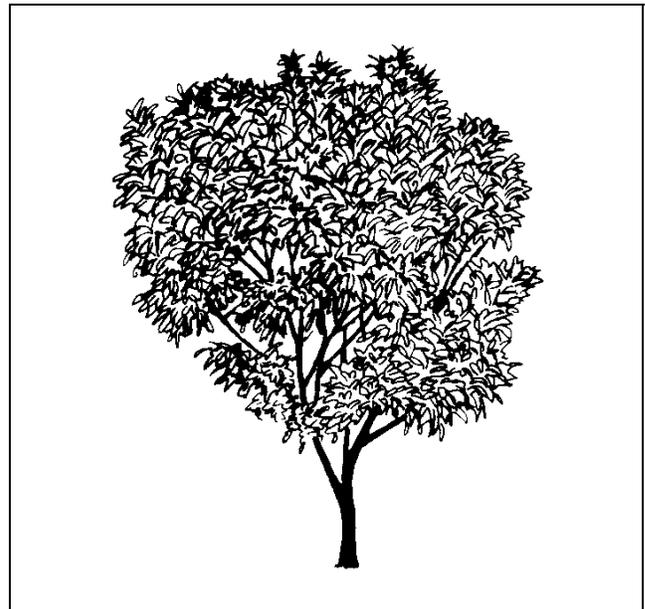


Figure 1. Young Lychee.

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 20 to 30 feet

**Spread:** 20 to 30 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round; spreading

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

### Foliage

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

**Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound

**Leaflet margin:** serrate

**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); lanceolate; oblong

**Leaflet venation:** pinnate

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

**Leaflet blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** yellow

**Flower characteristics:** showy; spring flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** none

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

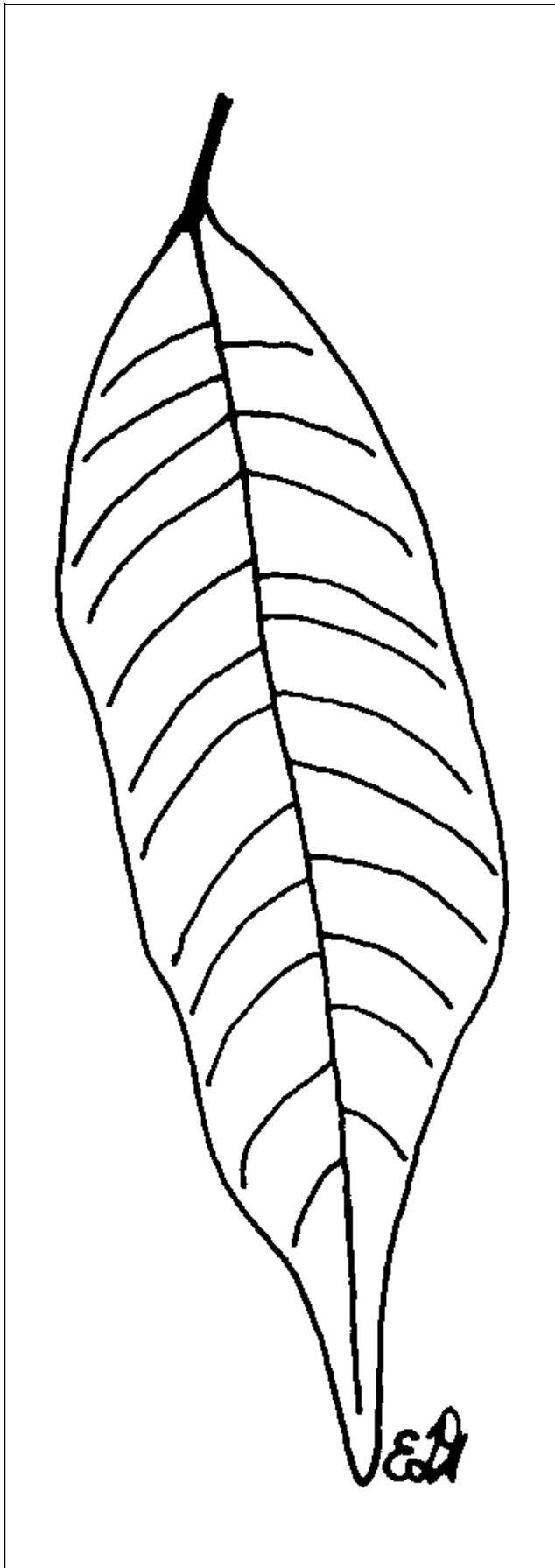


Figure 3. Foliage of Lychee.

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

### 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.