

Litchi chinensis Lychee¹

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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

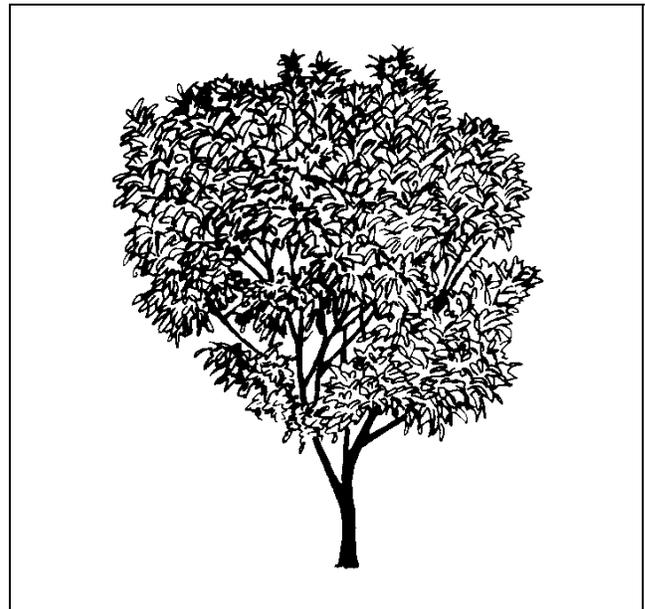


Figure 1. Young Lychee.

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

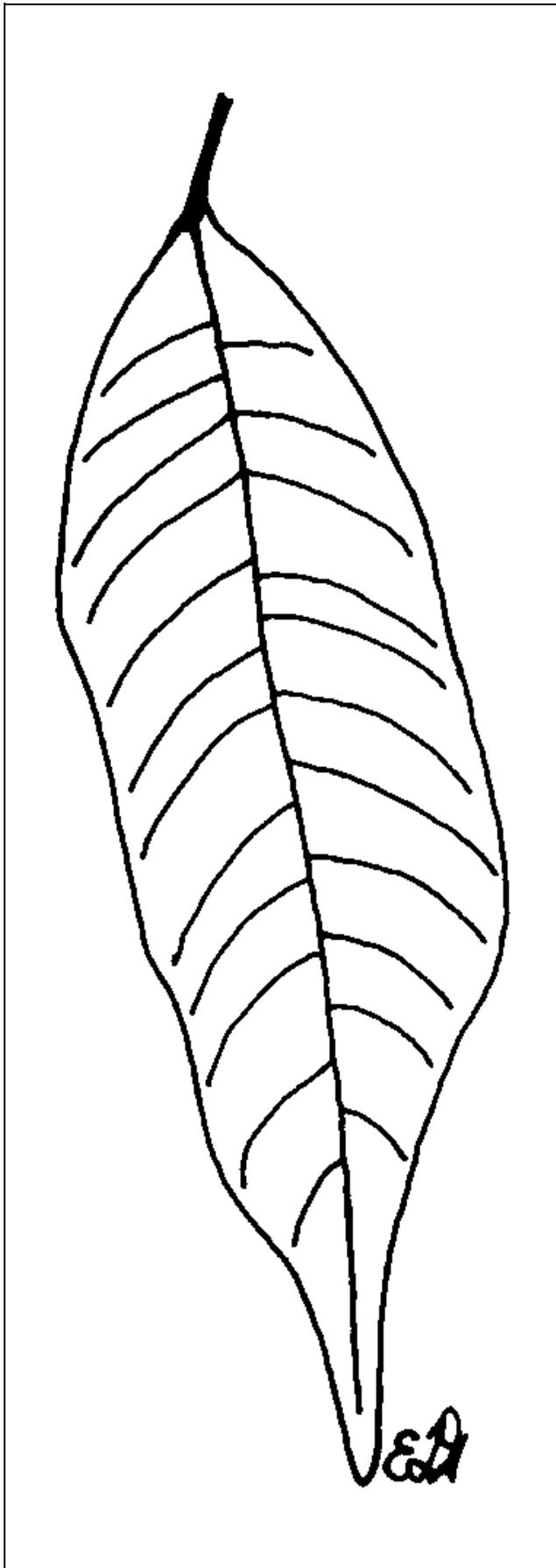


Figure 3. Foliage of Lychee.

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.