



## *Chionanthus retusus* Chinese Fringetree<sup>1</sup>

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

### INTRODUCTION

It is hard to think of a more beautiful, small, 20-foot-tall tree than Chinese Fringetree when it is in full bloom (Fig. 1). The pure white, fragrant flowers, emerging just as the dogwood flowers fade, hang in four-inch-long, spectacular terminal panicles which appear to cover the tree with snowy white cotton for two to three weeks. Flowers emerge at the terminal end of the spring shoot growth flush. This differs from the native Fringetree which flowers before leaves emerge. As with other white-flowered trees, Chinese Fringetree looks best when viewed against a dark background. Female plants develop purple/blue fruits which are highly prized by many birds. Fall color is yellow in northern climates, but is often an unnoticed brown in the south, with many leaves dropping to the ground a blackened green. The flowers can be forced into early bloom indoors.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Chionanthus retusus*

**Pronunciation:** kye-oh-NANTH-us ree-TOO-sus

**Common name(s):** Chinese Fringetree

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5B through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; narrow tree

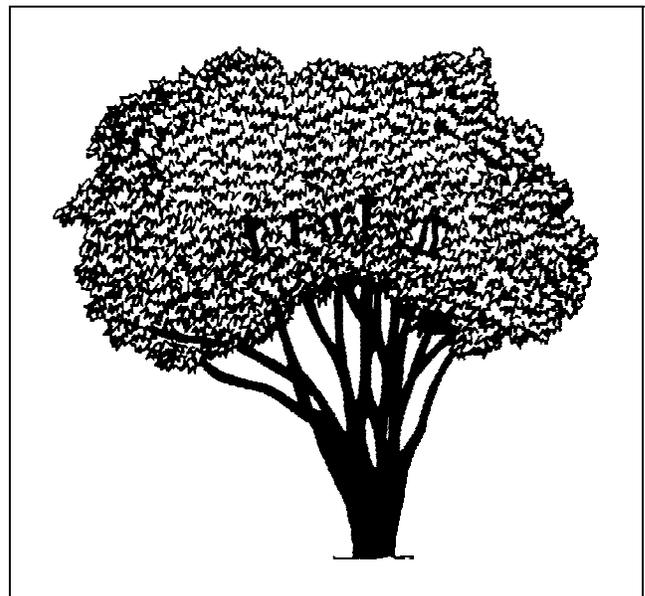


Figure 1. Mature Chinese Fringetree.

lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 15 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

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

**Crown shape:** round; vase shape

**Crown density:** moderate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval; round

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

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** blue; purple

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; 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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown; gray

**Current year twig thickness:** medium; thick

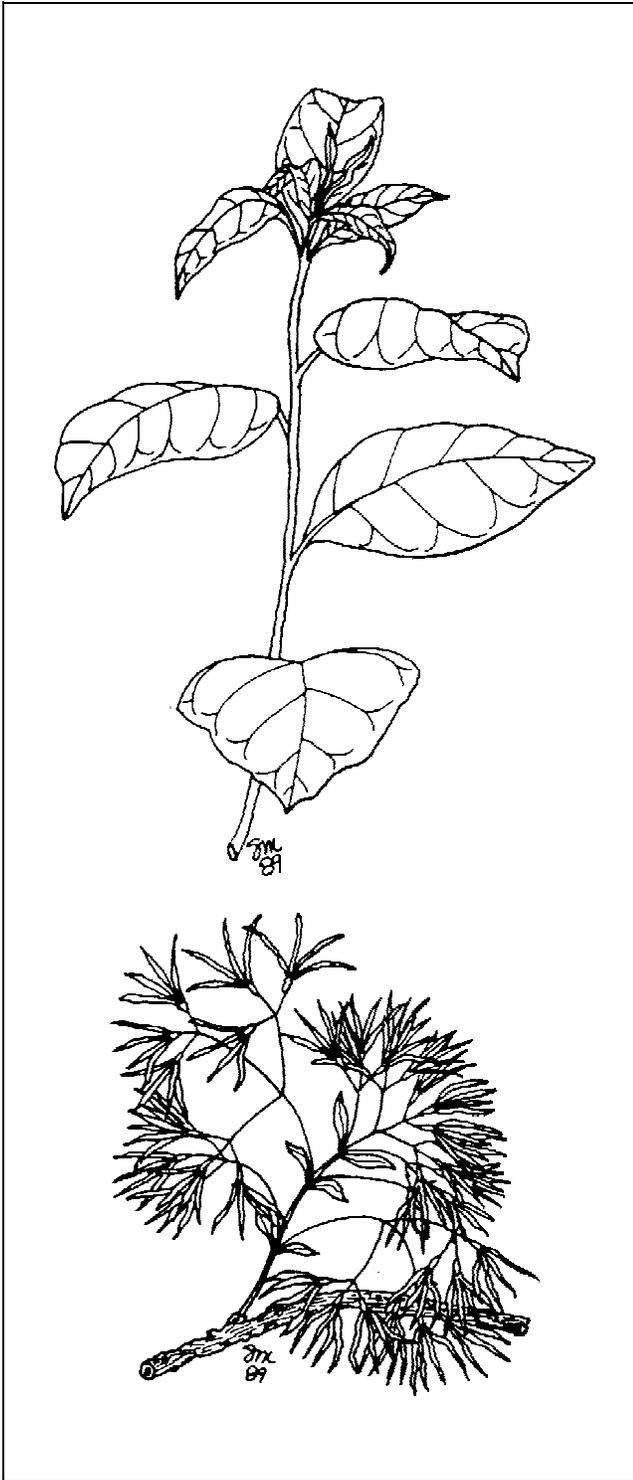


Figure 3. Foliage of Chinese Fringetree.

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

### 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

It forms a round ball if left unpruned but can be trained into a small tree with lower branches removed. It is naturally multitrunked and is usually found this way in nurseries but can be trained into a small, single-trunked specimen. It is probably one of the finest accents available in the nursery trade! It makes the perfect patio tree, or can be planted along streets if provided with occasional summer irrigation. Although reportedly difficult to transplant, Chinese Fringetree can be successfully moved quite easily with proper care. It is usually grown and sold in containers.

Chinese Fringetree looks best in a sunny spot sheltered from wind. The tree appears more attractive in the deep south when grown with several hours of shade but blooms best in full sun, on moist, acid soil, and will gladly grow in even wet soils. Chinese Fringetree grows very slowly, usually 4 to 10 inches per year, but can grow a foot per year if given rich, moist soil and plenty of fertilizer. Fringetree tolerates moderate drought but looks best if irrigated occasionally during extended summer drought.

Propagation is by seed, cuttings, or layering. A number of horticulturists have figured out how to reliably germinate *Chionanthus virginicus*. Perhaps the techniques apply to the Chinese Fringetree.

### Pests

It is generally pest free.

Occasionally mites will infest the foliage.

### Diseases

It is generally disease free.

Leaf spots can be caused by several genera of fungi. Most years, the leaf spots are not a problem and there is no cause for control.

Powdery mildews of different genera may attack Chinese Fringetree.

Stem canker can cause premature defoliation.