UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

ENH-523

Litchi chinensis: Lychee[1]

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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. 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.

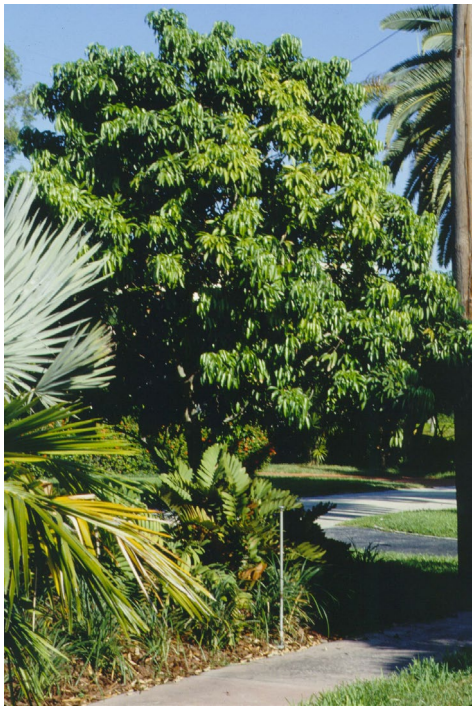

Figure 1. Young *Litchi chinensis*: Lychee
Credits: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Litchi chinensis*
Pronunciation: LEE-chee chih-NEN-sis
Common name(s): Lychee
Family: *Sapindaceae*
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential:has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.
Uses: hedge; fruit; specimen; screen; container or planter; deck or patio
Availability: not native to North America

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 20 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: round, spreading
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: lanceolate, oblong, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen, evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: thin
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained; 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.

Literature Cited

Fox, A.M., D.R. Gordon, J.A. Dusky, L. Tyson, and R.K. Stocker (2005) IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. Cited from the Internet (November 3, 2006), http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment.html