**Litchi chinensis**  
Lychee$^1$

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson$^2$

**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

---

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-364, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.

2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
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
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.


Propagation is by air-layering.

Pests

Scales.

Diseases

Mushroom root rot can be a problem on soils where oaks were grown.