Nyssa sinensis
Chinese Tupelo

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

The deciduous Chinese Tupelo probably grows 35 to 50 feet tall and almost as wide in a rounded shape (Fig. 1). Like many other Nyssa, young trees grow with a pyramidal habit. The six-inch-long, green leaves turn brilliant shades of red, yellow, and orange in fall before dropping. Small, greenish-white flowers appear in the spring in axillary clusters and are followed by small blue fruits. These are visible when they drop and stain sidewalks for a period of time but they wash away quickly following a rain.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Nyssa sinensis
Pronunciation: NISS-uh sigh-NEN-sis
Common name(s): Chinese Tupelo
Family: Nyssaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: 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; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 35 to 50 feet
Spread: 25 to 35 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: oval; round
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; serrate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: red; yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture
Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time  
**Pest resistance:** unknown

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Chinese Tupelo should be grown in full sun on moist, well-drained soil. The tree has not been grown in many places in this country and little else is known about the tree.

**Pests and Diseases**

Little is known about the susceptibility of this tree to pests and diseases.