

**Schefflera actinophylla**

*Schefflera*¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

The large, palmately compound, shiny leaves sit atop the multiple, thin, bare trunks of Schefflera, creating much the impression of an exotic, 25-foot-tall plant-umbrella (Fig. 1). Schefflera lends a tropical effect to any landscape use, from patio containers to interiorscapes to protected outdoor locations. Capable of reaching 40 feet in height, Schefflera will grow rapidly to create a dense windbreak or screen for property lines. When grown in full sun, trees will produce flowers during the summer, an unusual arrangement of small blooms on three-foot-diameter, stiff terminal clusters. These clusters are held above the foliage and are arranged like the ribs of an inverted umbrella, or like the tentacles of an octopus. The red blooms are followed by reddish-purple, half-inch fruits.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** Schefflera actinophylla  
**Pronunciation:** shef-LEER-uh ack-tin-oh-FILL-uh  
**Common name(s):** Schefflera, Queensland Umbrella-Tree  
**Family:** Araliaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 10 through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Uses:** suitable for growing indoors; not recommended for planting  
**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 30 to 40 feet  
- **Spread:** 10 to 15 feet  
- **Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette  
- **Crown shape:** upright  
- **Crown density:** moderate  
- **Growth rate:** fast

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Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: palmately compound
Leaflet margin: entire; undulate
Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); oblong
Leaflet venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaflet blade length: 8 to 12 inches; 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red
Flower characteristics: showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: purple; red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: stout; thick
Culture

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

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

Other

**Roots:** surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** No entries found.

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Schefflera will grow in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of well-drained soils but require full sun to flower. Trees will display their best growth on rich, moist soil in a full sun location. There is significant leaf drop on this easily-grown tree creating quite a racking job, but plants will require very little pruning if given enough overhead space to develop. Trees may be topped as desired to create multi-level masses of foliage. This may be desirable since the lower portions of the trunks lose all their foliage over time. Sometimes the tree is used as a house plant, but it is too often misused by planting it too close to a building.

It has naturalized in some parts of south Florida and has been placed on a list of exotic pest plants.

Propagation is by seeds, cuttings, or layers.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases of major concern. Scales and sooty mold are a minor problem. Trees used indoors are susceptible to infestations of spider mites.