

Chinaberry, pride-of-India

Melia azedarach L.

Mahogany family (Meliaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Chinaberry, or pride-of-India, is a popular ornamental tree planted for its showy cluster of pale purplish five-parted spreading flowers and for the shade of its dense dark green foliage. It is further characterized by the bipinnate leaves with long-pointed saw-toothed leaflets and pungent odor when crushed, and by the clusters of nearly round golden yellow poisonous berries conspicuous when leafless.

Small to medium-sized deciduous tree often becoming 20–50 ft (6–15 m) tall and 1–2 ft (0.3–0.6 m) in trunk diameter, with crowded, abruptly spreading branches forming hemispherical or flattened crown. Bark dark or reddish brown, smoothish, becoming furrowed. Inner bark whitish, slightly bitter and astringent. Twigs green, hairless or nearly so.

Leaves alternate, 8–16 inches (20–40 cm) or more in length, bipinnate or partly tripinnate. Leaflets numerous short-stalked, paired along slender green branches of leaf axis but single at ends, lance-shaped to ovate, 1–2 inches (2.5–5 cm) long and $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (1–2 cm) wide, short-pointed and mostly one-sided at base, thin, hairless or nearly so, dark green on upper surface, and paler beneath.

Flower clusters (panicles) 4–10 inches (10–25 cm) long at leaf bases, long-stalked and branched. Flowers showy fragrant, numerous on slender stalks, about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (10 mm) long and $\frac{5}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (15–19 mm) wide. Calyx of 5 greenish sepals $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) long; 5 pale purplish or lilac-colored petals $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (10 mm) long, narrow, spreading and slightly turned back; usually 10 stamens on narrow violet tube of $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm); and pale green pistil $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long with disk at base, 3–6 celled ovary, and long style.

Fruits or berries (drupes) about $\frac{5}{8}$ inch (15 mm) in diameter, smooth, but becoming a little shriveled, slightly fleshy. Stone hard, containing five or fewer narrow dark brown seeds $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long. These fruits are bitter, with poisonous or narcotic properties. Flowering from March to June in Hawaii, and the old slightly wrinkled yellow fruits generally present.

Sapwood yellowish white, heartwood light brown to reddish brown and attractively marked. Wood moderately soft, weak and brittle, and very susceptible to attack by drywood termites. Uses of the wood elsewhere

include tool handles, cabinets, furniture, and cigar boxes. It has not been used in Hawaii.

Extensively planted around the world for ornament and shade. This attractive tree is easily propagated from seeds, cuttings, and sprouts from stumps. It grows rapidly but is short-lived, and the brittle limbs are easily broken by the wind.

This species is poisonous, at least in some parts, and has insecticidal properties. Leaves and dried fruits have been used to protect stored clothing and other articles against insects. Various parts of the tree, including fruits, flowers, leaves, bark, and roots, have been employed medicinally in different countries. The berries are toxic to animals and have killed pigs, though cattle and birds reportedly eat the fruits. An oil suitable for illumination was extracted experimentally from the berries. The hard, angular, bony centers of the fruits, when removed by boiling are dyed and strung as beads. In parts of Asia this is a sacred tree.

Commonly cultivated and naturalized through the Hawaiian Islands in lowlands. It is reported to be hardy up to 9000 ft (2743 m) altitude, especially in uplands of Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii. Birds apparently have spread the fruits. Introduced into Hawaii about 1839, according to Degener. It may be seen commonly along the roads of the Kona District of Hawaii and near Ulupalakua Ranch on Maui.

Special areas: Waimea Arboretum, Tantalus

Champion

Height 75 ft (22.9 m), c.b.h. 18.5 ft (5.6 m), spread 96 ft (29.3 m). Koahe, South Kona, Hawaii (1967).

Range

Native of southern Asia, probably from Iran and Himalaya to China, but cultivated and naturalized in tropical and warm temperate regions of the world. Widely planted and escaped and naturalized locally in southeastern continental United States, California, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands.

Other common names

'inia, 'ilinia (Hawaii); chinatree, umbrella-tree, umbrella chinaberry, Indian-lilac, Persian lilac, beadtrees; alelaila, lilaila, pasilla (Puerto Rico); lilac (Virgin Islands); paraiso (Spanish); lelah (Pohnpei).

Umbrella chinaberry, or Texas umbrella-tree, is a horticultural variety with compact crown of erect radiating branches and drooping foliage. The Hawaiian name 'inia is a corruption of the word India, according to Degener.



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Flowers, leaf, fruits, $\frac{2}{3}$ X (P.R. v. 1).