

## Octopus-tree

*Schefflera actinophylla* (Endl.) Harms

Ginseng or aralia family (Araliaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

This distinctive ornamental is easily recognized by the several trunks mostly unbranched, the few very large palmately compound leaves with 7–12 leaflets slightly drooping in a circle at end of long leafstalk as in an umbrella, and the large showy clusters of many dark red or crimson flowers on 10–20 widely spreading dark purple axes suggesting arms of an octopus.

Small evergreen introduced tree 20–40 ft (6–12 m) high, with several trunks from base 4–12 inches (0.1–0.3 m) or more in diameter, unbranched or with few stout branches, and with flattened or rounded open crown, hairless throughout. Bark light gray, smoothish or becoming slightly fissured. Twigs few, very stout,  $\frac{3}{4}$ –2 inches (2–5 cm) in diameter, green, with light brown lines (lenticels).

Leaves alternate, palmately compound (digitate), about 2–3 ft (0.6–0.9 m) long. Leafstalks very long, 1–2 ft (0.3–0.6 m), relatively slender, enlarged at both ends, round, light green. In angle above leafstalk, also forming bud at end of twig, is a light green persistent stipule or very narrow long-pointed scale  $1\frac{1}{2}$ –2 inches (4–5 cm) long. Leaflets mostly 7–12 (5–18), spreading in circle at end of leafstalk on slender spokelike stalks of 2–4½ inches (5–11 cm). Leaflet blades oblong or elliptical, mostly 6–12 inches (15–30 cm) long and 3–5 inches (7.5–13 cm) broad, rounded and abruptly short-pointed at apex, rounded or short-pointed at base, slightly turned under at edges, slightly thickened and leathery. Upper surface shiny dark green with grooved light green midvein and inconspicuous side veins, and lower surface dull light green with slightly raised veins.

Flower clusters (panicles) large terminal, composed of 10–20 widely spreading stout axes. Flowers are borne 10–12 crowded stalkless in rounded heads  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (2 cm) across on dark purple stalks of  $\frac{3}{8}$ –½ inch (10–13 mm) along axis. Top half of the rounded dark red bud nearly ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter is composed of 10–12 narrow pointed thick petals  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch (5 mm) long, dark red on outer surface and whitish on inner surface, shedding early as half-round cap. Other flower parts are of same number as petals, calyx represented by narrow rim

with minute teeth. Stamens 10–12,  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch (5 mm) long, red, with stout filaments and large anthers, erect and slightly spreading  $\frac{3}{8}$ –½ inch (10–13 mm) across, soon shedding. Pistil half-round, turning from light to dark red, consists of inferior ovary whitish within and slightly resinous and aromatic, with 10–12 narrow cells each containing one ovule, and same number of dot stigmas in ring.

In fruit, head is composed of 10–12 berries, each bordered by four brownish black scales in form of a cup, which is persistent after shedding. Berry round or topshaped, blackish, ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter, with ring of stigmas at apex, ring slightly above middle, also vertical ridges corresponding to the 10–12 cells. Seed (nutlet) one in each cell, elliptical flattened, brown, ⅛ inch (3 mm) long. Flowering from April to October in Hawaii.

Wood soft, not durable, not used.

Propagated from cuttings and seeds. The plants will grow in poor sand and can be pruned and topped. The seeds sometimes germinate on other trees and send roots down to the ground.

Common as an ornamental in lowlands of Hawaii and escaping from cultivation, becoming a real tree weed. Introduced about 1900.

In southern and central Florida, this popular small tree is recommended for tropical effect in confined areas of office buildings, parking lots, patios, and homes. However, the berries stain sidewalks. This species withstands a few degrees of freezing temperature and flowers in about 10 years where located in the sun. Northward, it is grown indoors as a potted plant for the handsome foliage. Cultivated also in Puerto Rico.

### **Special areas**

Waimea Arboretum, Foster, Tantalus, Iolani

### **Champion**

Height 50 ft (15.3 m), c.b.h. 17.3 ft (5.3 m), spread 58 ft (17.7 m). State Forestry Arboretum, Hilo, Hawaii (1968).

### **Range**

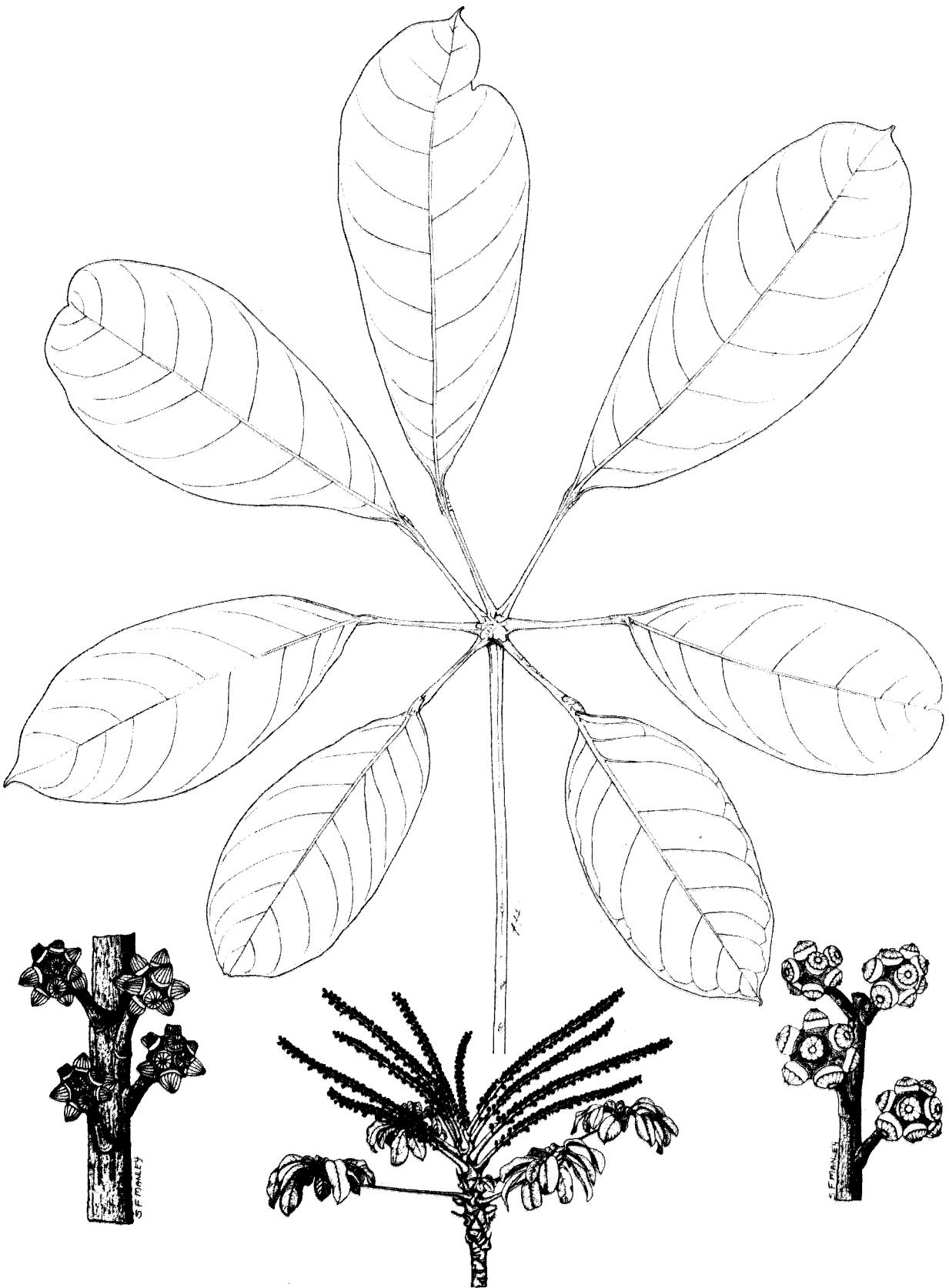
Native to Queensland, Australia. Introduced as an ornamental through the tropics and as a potted plant northward in temperate regions.

### **Other common names**

umbrella-tree, brassaia, schefflera

### **Botanical synonym**

*Brassaia actinophylla* Endl.



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Leaf,  $\frac{1}{3}$  X; flowers (lower left) and fruits (lower right),  $\frac{2}{3}$  X  
(P.R. v. 2). Flowering twig (below),  $\frac{1}{18}$  X (Degener).