



Chionanthus virginicus Fringetree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to think of a more beautiful, small tree than Fringetree when it is in full bloom (Fig. 1). The upright oval to rounded form adds dark green color in summer, bright white flowers in spring. The pure white, slightly fragrant flowers, emerging just as the dogwood flowers fade, hang in long, spectacular panicles which appear to cover the tree with cotton for two weeks. As with other white flowered trees, they look best when viewed against a dark background.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Chionanthus virginicus*

Pronunciation: kye-oh-NANTH-us ver-JIN-ih-kuss

Common name(s): Fringetree, Old-Mans-Beard

Family: *Oleaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 3 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

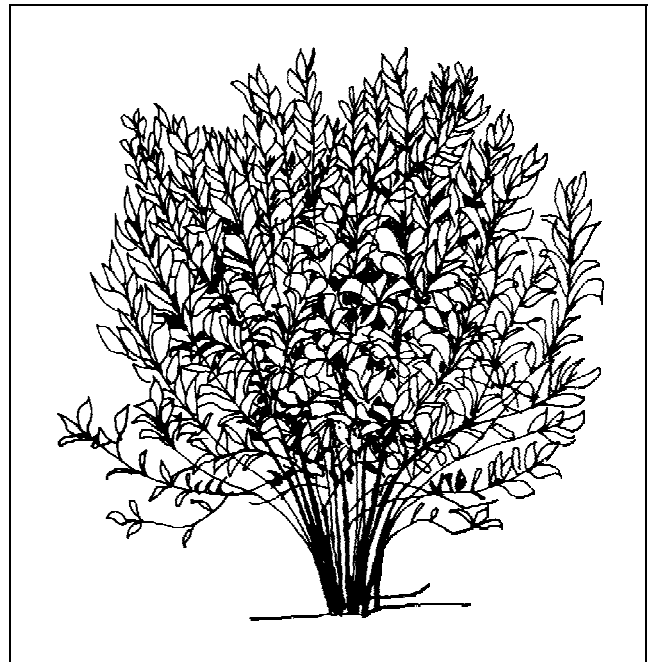


Figure 1. Middle-aged Fringetree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 12 to 20 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 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: slow

Texture: medium

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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.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite; whorled (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong; obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate; reticulate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch; < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: blue; purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; green; gray

Current year twig thickness: medium; thick

Culture

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

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

Drought tolerance: moderate



Figure 3. Foliage of Fringetree.

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

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

Dark green, glossy leaves emerge later in the spring than those of most plants just as the flowers are at peak bloom. This differs from Chinese Fringetree which flowers at the terminal end of the spring growth flush. Female plants develop purple-blue fruits which are highly prized by many birds. Fall color is yellow in northern climates, but is an unnoticed brown in the south, with many leaves dropping to the ground a blackened green. The flowers can be forced into early bloom indoors.

The plant eventually grows 20 to 30 feet tall in the woods, spreads to 15 feet, and tolerates city conditions well. But trees are more commonly seen 10 to 15 feet tall in landscapes where they are grown in the open. It forms as a multi-stemmed round ball if left unpruned but can be trained into a small tree with lower branches removed. Although reportedly difficult to transplant, Fringetree can be successfully moved

quite easily with proper care. Could be used beneath power lines where no pruning would be required.

Fringetree looks best in a sunny spot sheltered from wind. The foliage appears more attractive when grown with several hours of shade but the tree blooms best in full sun. Probably best overall with some afternoon shade. A North American native commonly found in upland woods and stream banks throughout most of the South, Fringetree prefers moist, acid soil and will gladly grow in even wet soils. It grows very slowly, usually 6 to 10 inches per year, but can grow a foot per year if given rich, moist soil and plenty of fertilizer. There is only one flush of growth each year.

Chionanthus pygmaea (Pygmy Fringetree) is native to central Florida and is considered an endangered plant. It produces nice flowers and grows to only eight feet tall.

Pests

Scale can be controlled with horticultural oil sprays.

Mites are pests in full sun locations.

Diseases

Leaf spots can be caused by several genera of fungi. Most years, the leaf spots are not a problem and there is no cause for control, but they can cause premature defoliation and spoil fall color display.

Powdery mildews of different genera may attack Fringetree.

Stem cankers can girdle stems.