

Chionanthus virginicus - White Fringetree (*Oleaceae*)

Chionanthus virginicus is one of the best native American flowering shrub/trees. Some consider White Fringetree to be the most beautiful tree when in bloom and believe it should replace the Flowering Dogwood as the quintessential "American Flowering Tree".

FEATURES

Form

-deciduous tree or shrub



(less than 12" per year)

-moderate life span

Culture

- best in sandy loam, slightly acidic soil in a sunny site, with afternoon shade
- will also grow in partial shade
- roots must be kept cool with appropriate mulching
- somewhat adaptable to other soil conditions except alkalinity and drought (tolerates city conditions)
- propagated by seed and, with difficulty, from rooted cuttings
- limited availability, B& B

Foliage

- opposite, simple
- entire
- coarse
- narrow elliptic and with a pointy tip
- 3-5" long x variable width
- medium green
- downy, especially on the veins
- leaves emerge later in the spring than those of most plants
- autumn color yellow to brown



Flowers

-dioecious (male and female plants)

- 10-20' tall x 10-20' wide
- spreading, open habit
- variable shapes
- commonly multi-trunked, but can be pruned into single stem form
- slow rate of growth

- white, before the foliage
- pleasant fragrance
- loose drooping panicles, 6-8" long
- late May, on old wood
- male flowers more attractive

Fruits

- dark blue berry
- egg-shaped, 0.5" long
- effective in Sept.

Twigs

- stout, often thickened between the nodes
- green to bluff-brown
- slightly squarish
- onion-skin like bark
- stems marked by dark lenticels

Trunk

- starts gray, smooth and becomes slightly ridged and furrowed
- bark is thin and easily damaged by mechanical impact

USAGE

Function

- specimen, near large buildings
- group in border plantings
- excellent in borders
- best against a dark background
- also good for naturalizing

Texture

- medium texture in foliage and when bare
- moderate density in foliage and when bare

Assets

- outstanding floral display

Liabilities

- slow growth
- some damage from scales and mites as well as leaf spots, powdery mildew, and canker

Habitat

- Zones 3 to 9
- Native to Eastern U.S., New Jersey to Florida and Texas

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- other spring-flowering trees (e.g. *Cercis canadensis*, *Cornus florida*, *Crataegus*, *Malus*, etc.)

Cultivars – Variants – Related species

- the straight species is the main form available
- Chionanthus retusus* - Chinese Fringetree - similar to, but eventually larger than White Fringetree except that the flowers appear at the end of a shoot growth flush in the spring (with leaves)

Hardiness Zones: 5 to 8

Height: 20' Spread: 20' Form: rounded

Chinese Fringe Tree grows best in a sunny location.

The white flowers appear in late spring or early summer. May not be as hardy. The bark is also ornamental and provides winter interest.