

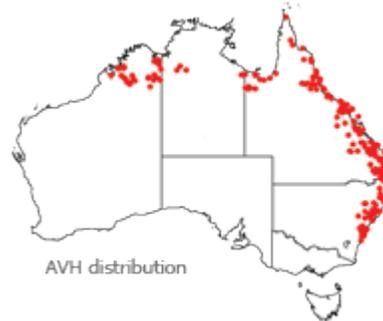
White Cedar - *Melia azedarach*

Due to its wide distribution throughout Australia and South-east Asia, this tree has many common names. On the north coast of NSW it is known as White Cedar.

Other common names include Chinaberry, Pride of India, Cape lilac, syringa berrytree, Persian lilac, Indian lilac, Texas umbrella, umbrella tree, umbrella cedar, bead-tree, Ceylon cedar, Ceylon mahogany, and syringa



Flowers and berries



The genus name *Melia* is derived from [μελία](#) (*melía*), the Greek word used by Theophrastus (c. 371 – c. 287 BC) for manna ash or South European flowering ash (*Fraxinus ornus*), which has similar leaves. The species *azedarach* is from the French 'azédarac' which in turn is from the Persian ***azedarach*** - the name given by the Persian physician Avicenna (980–1037) to a poisonous tree.

It is a deciduous [tree](#) of the mahogany family, Meliaceae. It is regarded as coloniser on the edge of the rainforest. It is often be found as an under storey plant in eucalypt forests (wet sclerophyll) or in disturbance gap within rainforests or rainforest edges.

In Australia its natural distribution is from around Cooktown in north Queensland through to the south coast of New South Wales. It has become naturalised in other areas of Australia, including the Kimberley region of Western Australia and southern parts of South Australia. In southeastern USA, parts of the Pacific and New Zealand it is listed as an invasive species and planted in plantations in Kenya.

White Cedar can easily invade and naturalise in both disturbed and undisturbed areas. The plant is capable of producing large amount of bird-dispersed seeds, thus enabling it to colonise an area if left unchecked.

The leaves and seeds (if eaten in quantity) are toxic to humans. The toxins are neurotoxins and unidentified resins. The first symptoms of poisoning appear a few hours after ingestion. They may include loss of appetite, vomiting, constipation or diarrhea, bloody faeces, stomach pain, pulmonary congestion, cardiac arrest, rigidity, lack of coordination and general weakness. Death may take place after about 24 hours.

The toxins are chemically related to the primary insecticidal compound in the commercially important neem oil. These compounds are probably related to the wood

and seed's resistance to pest infestation, and maybe to the unattractiveness of the flowers to animals.

Description

A large deciduous tree, often grown as a shade or street tree. It is a fast growing short lived tree.

The adult tree has a rounded crown, and commonly measures 7–12 meters in height and occasional in good locations reaching 45 meters in height.

The plant prefers open sun and can do well in partial shade too. It is hardy to most frosts and can withstand extended dry periods. It can also adapt to a wide range of soil conditions.



The leaves are up to 50 centimeters long, alternate, long-petioled, two or three times compound (odd-pinnate); the leaflets are dark green above and lighter green below, with serrate margins.

The flowers are small and fragrant, with five pale purple or lilac petals, growing in clusters.

Flowers during autumn and fruits are produced thereafter, usually from March to August.

The fruit is a drupe, marble-sized, light yellow at maturity, hanging on the tree all winter, and gradually becoming wrinkled and almost white.

In the past the hard, five-grooved seeds were widely used for making rosaries and other products requiring beads. However these uses have been superseded by plastics.

It can be propagated easily through seeds or root cuttings. The plant reaches maturity in 6–10 years and can develop viable seeds. The seeds of the plant can remain viable for number of years. No pre-sowing treatment is required for propagation from seed.



Timber Qualities



This is of medium density, and heartwood ranges in colour from pale brown in Australia to dark red in Asia. The sapwood is creamy and readily distinguishable and susceptible to lyctid borer attack.. In appearance it is readily confused with the unrelated Burmese teak (*Tectona grandis*). White Cedar (*Melia azedarach*) – in keeping with other members of the family Meliaceae – has a timber of high quality.

Wood texture is very coarse and uneven due to the ring porous nature of the wood. It is straight grain. Easy to work but difficult to give a high finish.

Green weight density is 640kg per cubic meter. Air dry density is 450kg per cubic meter. It is easy to dry with shrinkage of 2.5% radial and 4.5% tangential.

Uses are non structural including wood turning, internal joinery and furniture making.