

# Chinaberry Tree

## INVASIVE SPECIES OF THE MONTH

CHRISTIAN SNEAD

Have you noticed a tree around town covered with dense clusters of lavender flowers? As lovely as it looks, it's actually the invasive Chinaberry tree (*Melia azedarach*). Native to India, and southeast Asia, Chinaberry was first introduced to Georgia in the 1830s as a fast-growing shade tree. Since then, it has escaped cultivation and spread widely, commonly appearing in yards, along roadsides, fence lines, and at the edges of forests and fields.

Chinaberry grows up to 50 feet tall and often develops multiple trunks. Its bark becomes rough and deeply grooved with age, while the twigs remain smooth and glossy with tiny pale dots. It has large, compound leaves with dark lance-shaped leaflets that turn golden yellow in the fall. Right now, those clusters of purple blooms may catch your eye—but soon they'll be replaced by just as many yellow berries.

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Unfortunately, those berries are toxic, especially to people, animals, and some birds. In fact, every part of the Chinaberry tree contains toxins. It also produces chemicals that suppress surrounding vegetation and alters the soil by increasing nitrogen levels, giving it a competitive edge over native plants.

Chinaberry's ability to grow quickly, reproduce both by seed and vegetatively, and thrive in a wide range of conditions makes it a real threat to our local ecosystems. If you find one growing on your property, consider removing it. While small seedlings can be pulled up by hand, larger trees usually require cutting and immediate application of an herbicide like triclopyr to the stump. Be prepared to follow up, as Chinaberry resprouts easily.

Now's a great time to spot and stop this invader before it spreads even further.



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