UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

ENH743

Schefflera actinophylla: Schefflera[1]

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Introduction

The large, palmately compound, shiny leaves sit atop the multiple, thin, bare trunks of schefflera, creating much the impression of an exotic, 25-foot-tall plant-umbrella. Schefflera lends a tropical effect to any landscape use, from patio containers to interiorscapes to protected outdoor locations. Capable of reaching 40 feet in height, schefflera will grow rapidly to create a dense windbreak or screen for property lines. When grown in full sun, trees will produce flowers during the summer, an unusual arrangement of small blooms on three-foot-diameter, stiff terminal clusters. These clusters are held above the foliage and are arranged like the ribs of an inverted umbrella, or like the tentacles of an octopus. The red blooms are followed by reddish-purple, half-inch fruits.

General Information

Scientific name: *Schefflera actinophylla*
Pronunciation: shef-LEER-uh ack-tin-oh-FILL-uh
Common name(s): schefflera, Queensland umbrella-tree
Family: *Araliaceae*
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Figure 2)
Origin: native to Queensland, Australia
Invasive potential: invasive and not recommended (Central and South); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North)
Uses: indoors

Figure 1. Full Form—*Schefflera actinophylla*: schefflera

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 40 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: upright/erect
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: palmately compound; made up of 5 to 18 sets of leaflets
Leaf margin: entire, undulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: leaflets are 3 ½ to 12 inches
Leaf color: dark green and shiny on top, paler green underneath
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: bright red
Flower characteristics: showy; emerges in clusters on 2'–4' long racemes
Flowering: Summer

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: ½ inch
Fruit covering: fleshy drupe
Fruit color: purplish-red
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Figure 3. Leaf—*Schefflera actinophylla*: schefflera

Figure 4. Flower—*Schefflera actinophylla*: schefflera

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Bark: greenish or gray, and smooth
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: thick, very thick
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Figure 5. Bark—*Schefflera actinophylla*: schefflera
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Schefflera will grow in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of well-drained soils but require full sun to flower. Trees will display their best growth on rich, moist soil in a full sun location. There is significant leaf drop on this easily-grown tree creating quite a racking job, but plants will require very little pruning if given enough overhead space to develop. Trees may be topped as desired to create multi-level masses of foliage. This may be desirable since the lower portions of the trunks lose all their foliage over time. Sometimes the tree is used as a house plant, but it is too often misused by planting it too close to a building.

It has naturalized in some parts of south Florida and has been placed on a list of exotic pest plants.

Propagation is by seeds, cuttings, or layers.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern. Scales and sooty mold are a minor problem. Trees used indoors are susceptible to infestations of spider mites.

References

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

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