

Chionanthus virginicus

Fringe tree, American fringe tree, Old-man's-beard



Chionanthus virginicus (Fringe tree, American fringe tree, Old man's beard) occurs in the wild growing alongside creeks and lakes in the Eastern United States although the tree is also found in rockier landscapes. Owing to its large range the species occurs in many different forest sites, impressively and to great effect in combination with *Liriodendron tulipifera*, *Fraxinus americana* and *Acer rubrum*. Juvenile specimens have a multi-stem and vase-shaped crown, later becoming flattened spherical in maturity. Most trees are wider than tall and ultimately attain a size of five metres tall and wide. The name *Chionanthus*, from the Greek *chion* (snow) and *anthus* (flower), was invented by the Swedish physician and botanist Linnaeus.

Even before the foliage has fully developed, *Chionanthus virginicus* blooms profusely, appearing like a downy mass of brilliant white flowers with specks of bright green emerging buds. From a distance the tree in bloom looks like a single white cloud befitting its name. The flowers can be discerned from afar by their delightful scent which is also hugely appealing to bees and butterflies. After flowering, green fruits are produced which later change colour to purple-blue to almost black. Bright green new foliage appears late on the tree and summer foliage is dark green, leathery and glossy and changes to yellow in autumn. The bark and twigs of *Chionanthus virginicus* are greyish brown and smooth and covered in distinct lenticels.

Although the tree occurs naturally on moist, slightly acid and nutrient-rich soils, *Chionanthus virginicus* will also fare well on inferior soils. It has no diseases or pests and makes a nice addition to small and large gardens in any season. But also in sunny spots in parks and central reservations the American fringe tree should certainly be used more and it is a real eye-catcher as a single specimen. The species is occasionally grafted on *Fraxinus ornus*, which produces a small standard.

TYPES OF PLANTING

Tree types: standard trees, multi-stemmed trees, characteristic trees, solitary shrubs | **Topiary on stem:** multi-stem umbrella

USE

Location: park, central reservation, in containers, roof garden, large garden, small garden, patio, cemetery, traffic areas, industrial zones | **Pavement:** none

CHARACTERISTICS

Crown shape: flattened spherical | **Crown structure:** semi-open | **Height:** 3 - 5 m | **Width:** 3 - 5 m | **Winter hardiness zone:** 5A - 9A

ASPECTS

Wind: slightly tolerant to wind | **Soil:** loess, sabulous clay, sand, loamy soil | **Nutrient level:** rich in nutrients | **Soil moisture level:** moist | **Light requirements:** sun | **pH range:** acidic, neutral | **Host plant/forage plant:** bees, butterflies

PLANTKENMERKEN

Flowers: panicle, corymbose, striking, pendulous, strongly scented | **Flower colour:** white | **Flowering period:** May - June | **Leaf colour:** dark green, underside pale green | **Leaves:** deciduous, ovate, ovoid, thick, leathery, polished, slightly hairy | **Autumn colour:** yellow-brown | **Fruits:** striking, small, raceme, drupe | **Fruit colour:** blue-black, green | **Bark colour:** grey-brown | **Bark:** smooth, later on rough | **Twig colour:** grey-brown | **Twigs:** bare, with lenticels, finely branched | **Root system:** shallow, slightly branched, highly branched, fine roots, on own root