

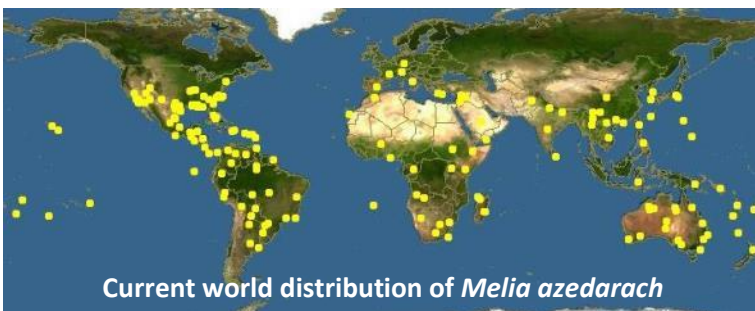
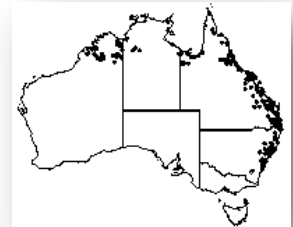
Melia azedarach

White Cedar



Common names for plants can be very confusing; a good example of this is ***Melia azedarach***, known locally in Sydney as the **White Cedar**. However, the name **Cedar** conjures up images of conifers, cone bearing plants, such as pine trees and cypresses. *Melia azedarach* is a flowering plant not even remotely related to the many conifers with the same common name, such as *Thuja occidentalis*, the White Cedar of North America. Perhaps we should consider using another of the many common names used for *M. azedarach* elsewhere in the world, such as **Cape Lilac**, **Persian Lilac**, **Indian Lilac**, **Bead Tree** or **Chinaberry Tree**!

Melia azedarach is quite an enigma. It just doesn't look like an Australian native tree, and yet is widely distributed in Australia, along the east coast and right across the north from Queensland through the Northern Territory to the Kimberley in Western Australia. It is also a native of south-east Asia, extending to Myanmar and India. Molecular biology would be a useful tool to unravel the origins of this tree which has been cultivated in Europe, Africa, North and South America. Botanist David Mabberley¹ wrote: '*Selected forms have long been cultivated in India and China. Groups of cultivars selected from these two centres of domestication were introduced to other warm parts of the world*'. Mabberley¹ also describes the earliest mention of *Melia azedarach* which appeared in Taoist classic writings, ~ 300 BC, of Zhuang Zi (庄子) who described the fruit of the tree being eaten by a *fabulous bird*.





This small deciduous flowering tree is widely planted in parks and gardens and as a street tree. However, it does have some drawbacks: it is a highly invasive species; fruits (yellow berries) and leaves are highly toxic; and hairy caterpillars (*Leptoceneria reducta*) can decimate the foliage in a few days. ***Melia azedarach*** has another claim to fame: its very close relationship to **Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*)**, the iconic Australian rainforest tree harvested almost to extinction for its beautiful close-grained, rich red timber. It is also a relative of the **Neem Tree, *Azadirachta indica***. All three belong in the Meliaceae (Mahogany family).

Map of current world distribution has been modified from *Encyclopedia of Life*:

<http://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20m?map=Melia+azedarach>

Map of current Australian distribution has been modified from *Atlas of Living Australia*

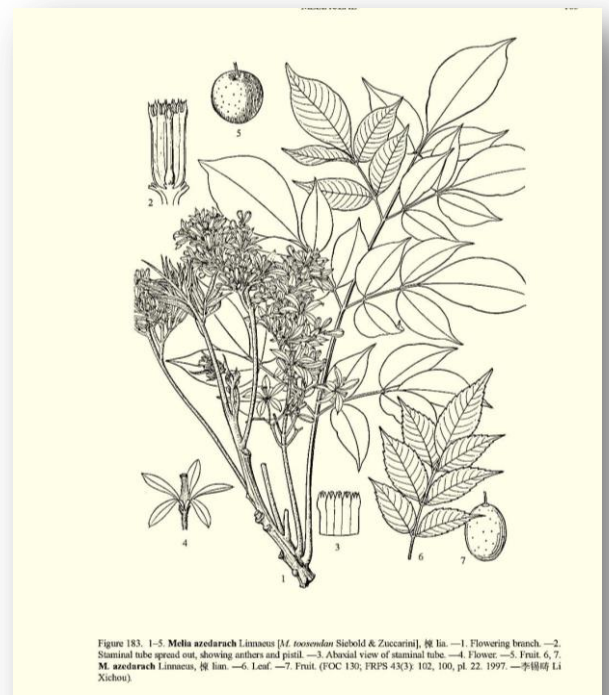
http://avh.ala.org.au/occurrences/search?taxa=Melia+azedarach#tab_mapView

¹Mabberley, David J. 1984. A Monograph of Melia in Asia and the Pacific: The history of White Cedar and Persian Lilac. The Gardens' Bulletin Singapore

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Melia azedarach – illustration in *Flora of China* by 李锡畴