



Chinese Pistache

Scientific Name: *Pistacia chinensis*



Summary:

The Chinese pistache is a beautiful and tough deciduous tree that's becoming more and more popular in California landscapes. Native to China and Taiwan, this tree grows well in our local climate and brings amazing color to the fall season. It usually grows between 25 and 35 feet tall and forms a rounded, balanced canopy as it matures. The leaves are made up of multiple narrow leaflets that turn shades of red, orange, and yellow in autumn. In spring, it produces small greenish flowers, and if you have a female tree, you'll also get small clusters of red to blue berries in the fall.

Chinese pistache is a great choice for anyone looking for a low-maintenance, drought-tolerant tree that can handle urban life. It grows best in full sun and doesn't mind poor or compacted soils. Once it's established, it needs very little water and is even a good option for fire-wise landscaping. While it's not native to California, it still supports local wildlife and brings seasonal interest to yards, streetscapes, and parks. It's also pretty easy to care for, just give it some space to grow and occasional pruning if needed.

When it comes to fire mitigation and creating defensible space, the Chinese pistache is a reliable choice. Its high tolerance for heat and drought means it thrives without frequent watering, which helps reduce excess vegetation and fuel around structures. As a deciduous tree, it drops its leaves in fall, making it less flammable during the peak of fire season compared to oily or resinous evergreens. Its open canopy structure also limits the chance of fire climbing



into the crown, especially when properly pruned and maintained. Planted at a safe distance from buildings and spaced appropriately, Chinese pistache can be part of a fire-wise landscape.

References:

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- Photo credit to Trees of Stanford
 - Chinese pistache, Rains Houses. Irene Beardsley, 25 Apr 2005
 - Chinese pistache fall color, Escondido Mall behind Memorial Church. The upper canopy of this tree started off by turning red and orange; at this stage, gold dominates the remaining leaves. Sairus Patel, 26 Nov 2017