

***Abelia x grandiflora*¹**

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

Glossy abelia is a fine-textured, semi-evergreen, sprawling shrub with 1.5-inch-long, red-tinged leaves arranged along thin, arching, multiple stems (Figure 1). It is a hybrid between *A. chinensis* and *A. uniflora*. It stands out from other plants because the leaves retain the reddish foliage all summer long, whereas many plants with reddish leaves lose this coloration later in the summer. Considered to be evergreen in its southern range, glossy abelia will lose 50% of its leaves in colder climates, and the remaining leaves will take on a more pronounced red color. Reaching a height of 6 to 10 feet with a spread of 6 feet, the gently rounded form of glossy abelia is clothed from spring through fall with terminal clusters of delicate pink and white, small, tubular flowers. Multiple stems arise from the ground in a vase shape, spreading apart as they ascend into the foliage.



Figure 1. Glossy abelia.

Common name(s): glossy abelia

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*

Plant type: shrub

General Information

Scientific name: *Abelia x grandiflora*

Pronunciation: uh-BEEL-ee-uh
 gran-dif-FLOR-uh

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Flower

Flower color: lavender

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering; pleasant fragrance

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: tan

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant.

Use and Management

Glossy abelia grows in an upright, spreading vase shape if left unpruned with numerous thin stems arising from the ground. Stems eventually branch near their tips forming a shrub with a full top and a thin bottom. The cascading nature of glossy abelia makes it ideal for use as a specimen, foundation plant or shrub border. It also can be planted along a steep bank for erosion control, or it can be clipped into a hedge. Be sure that the top of the hedge is clipped narrower than the bottom to allow adequate light to reach the bottom foliage. This will help keep the plant full all the way to the ground.

Foliage arises maroon fading to dark green, lending a reddish cast to the plant during active growth. The small powderpuff-pink flowers add color continuously during the warm months. Blooming on new growth in the summer, glossy abelia benefits from springtime pruning and will require occasional thinning to keep it in bounds as a hedge. Thinning will help light reach the interior foliage stimulating branching and creating a fuller plant.

Glossy abelia enjoys fairly rich, moist but well-drained soil in a full sun or lightly shaded location and has good drought tolerance. Plants become thin and unattractive in the shade and do not flower. Plant on 4- to 6-foot centers to form a screen or foundation planting, slightly closer for a hedge. The foliage darkens during the winter, but plants generally remain full all during the cold months.

Cultivars include: 'Confetti' - cream-variegated foliage, cream colored area turns reddish in cool weather, evergreen to about 10 degrees; 'Francis Mason' - new green foliage changes to glossy yellow as it matures, color more noticeable in full sun, light pink flowers, 3 to 4 feet high; 'Prostrata' - prostrate growth habit, white flowers, sometimes used as a ground cover; and 'Sherwoodii' - dwarf, to 3 feet, somewhat smaller leaves and flowers. *Abelia* 'Edward Goucher', a hybrid between *Abelia x grandiflora* and *Abelia schumannii*, has abundant lavender-pink flowers and showy red calyces, reaches 5 to 8 feet, and is best used in USDA hardiness zone

6 and south. It is superior to most other abelia due to the highly fragrant pink flowers.

Propagation is by cuttings of long, leafless, hardwood stems taken in November to January.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern, but abelia plants are occasionally bothered by aphids.