

# Viburnum odoratissimum: Sweet Viburnum<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Large, leathery, dark green, glossy leaves and clusters of extremely fragrant, small, white flowers, completely covering the plant in springtime, make Sweet Viburnum a longtime landscape favorite. The large, dull green leaves form a moderately coarse texture. For some reason, it has fallen out of favor as a small tree in recent years. This adaptable tree should be 'rediscovered' by landscape architects and others specifying small trees for urban and suburban landscapes. Often used as a screen or clipped hedge, its dense, spreading, evergreen habit makes Sweet Viburnum suitable for use as a small tree, reaching 25 to 30 feet tall and wide at maturity, with a dense, multibranched, rounded canopy. The flowers are often followed by small, red berries which turn black when ripe and are moderately showy.



Figure 1. Mature *Viburnum odoratissimum*: Sweet Viburnum Credits: Ed Gilman

### **General Information**

Scientific name: Viburnum odoratissimum

**Pronunciation:** vye-BER-num oh-duh-ruh-TISS-ih-mum

Common name(s): Sweet Viburnum

Family: Caprifoliaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8B through 10A (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida

**Uses:** screen; deck or patio; hedge; container or planter; specimen; street without sidewalk; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide;

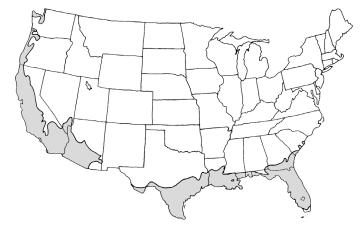


Figure 2. Range

- 1. This document is ENH-816, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised March 2007. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.
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tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; shade

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

## **Description**

Height: 25 to 30 feet **Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round Crown density: dense Growth rate: slow Texture: medium

### **Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate, entire Leaf shape: elliptic (oval) Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

**Fall color:** no color change **Fall characteristic:** not showy



Figure 3. Flower

#### **Flower**

Flower color: white/cream/gray Flower characteristics: showy

#### **Fruit**

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy Fruit color: red, black

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy;

fruit/leaves not a litter problem

#### **Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy;

typically multi-trunked; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green Current year twig thickness: thick Wood specific gravity: unknown

#### **Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade,

shade tolerant

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

well-drained

Drought tolerance: high Aerosol salt tolerance: low

#### **Other**

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible **Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

## **Use and Management**

Sweet Viburnum grows quickly in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of soils. It is tolerant to drought, holding up very well in unirrigated landscapes once established. Relatively maintenance-free, Sweet Viburnum grown as a tree will require pruning to control size and shape. A nice, neat, compact canopy develops without any training. Interior sprouts and branches need to be removed to make the trunk show. Only lower branches need removal to allow for pedestrian and vehicle clearance beneath the crown. This would be a good tree for planting along a street where power lines or other obstructions limit overhead space. Nurseries should be encouraged to grow this adaptable plant as a tree form in addition to the shrub form commonly available. It can be trained to one trunk or grown as a multi-stemmed specimen.

The cultivar `Emerald Lustre' has larger leaves and `Nanum' is a dwarf form. *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki* has large glossy leaves and flower panicles, and beautiful red berries.

Propagation is by cuttings or layerings.

#### **Pests**

This tree is usually fairly pest-free.

Viburnum aphid is gray to dark green and feeds in clusters at the tips of the branches, causing leaf curl. The insects

can be dislodged with high pressure water spray from the garden hose. They usually cause little or no appreciable damage.

Inspect the stems of unhealthy-looking plants for possible scale infestations. If found, spray with horticultural oil for some control.

Sweet Viburnum is also infested by thrips, mites, white-fly, bagworms, and sooty mold, but none are normally serious.

#### **Diseases**

Bacterial leafspot causes round, water-soaked spots on leaves and young stems. These develop into shrunken, brown areas about 1/8-inch in diameter. Destroy infected leaves.

Bacterial crown gall forms galls on the lower stems. Do not replant in the same spot.

Shoot blight causes grayish to brown decayed spots on the leaves. The spots first appear at the leaf margins, then spread to the rest of the leaf. Infected flower clusters or twigs are killed.

A number of fungi cause leaf spots. Leaf spots are not usually serious diseases. Rake up and destroy infected leaves, if you wish.

Downy mildew and powdery mildew cause a white powdery growth on the leaves but usually cause only cosmetic damage of little consequence.

## **Literature Cited**

Fox, A.M., D.R. Gordon, J.A. Dusky, L. Tyson, and R.K. Stocker (2005) IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. Cited from the Internet (November 3, 2006), http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment.html