Introduction
Buttonbush has attractive, medium green leaves followed by a late spring flower display unmatched by many plants (Fig. 1). White flowers are borne in a one to one-and-one-half inch diameter globe and fill the canopy when few other plants are in flower. Bright red fruits have formed by late summer to bring the plant back into prominence in the landscape. Most people do not notice the plant until it flowers or displays its fruit.

General Information
Scientific name: *Cephalanthus occidentalis*

Pronunciation: seff-uh-LANTH-us ock-sid-en-TAY-liss

Common name(s): buttonbush

Family: Rubiaceae

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 10A (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: specimen; border; mass planting; attracts butterflies

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

Description
Height: 6 to 12 feet

Spread: 6 to 10 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Figure 1. Buttonbush.

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** whorled
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** entire
- **Leaf shape:** ovate
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- **Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** white
- **Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** round
- **Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch
- **Fruit cover:** dry or hard
- **Fruit color:** red
- **Fruit characteristic:** showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
- **Current year stem/twig color:** gray/silver
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun
- **Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
- **Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- **Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

- **Roots:** usually not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- **Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding
- **Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive
- **Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**

Most specimens of buttonbush are small, reaching no more than about 4 to 6 feet tall. Older plants can reach to 10 feet tall in a moist site and grow to more than 12 feet wide. Several stems emerge from the ground forming a flat-topped, vase-shaped canopy.

A native shrub best suited for wet sites, buttonbush adapts to landscape sites provided roots are irrigated or kept moist to wet from a nearby stream or pond. Some dieback may occur, especially in the southern part of its range, during moderate or extended drought.

A tea can be made from the inner bark which was used to induce vomiting. Chewing the bark is reported to relieve a toothache.