**Leucothoe racemosa** Dog Hobble, Sweetbells Leucothoe¹

Edward F. Gilman²

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**Introduction**

Sweetbells leucothoe is a small, deciduous shrub that grows 4 to 6 ½ feet tall and wide. The tiny, membranous, bright green leaves of this plant turn red in the fall of the year. This plant will begin to produce its magnificent flowers in May and will continue to bloom until June. The lovely, white, urceolate flowers of sweetbells leucothoe occur in very long horizontal racemes, and they have a very pleasant fragrance. The fruits of these shrubs are capsules; they are light brown and inconspicuous. This plant is excellent near patios and in home gardens.

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**General Information**

*Scientific name:* Leucothoe racemosa  
*Pronunciation:* lō-KAHTH-oh-ee race-MOE-suh  
*Common name(s):* Dog hobble, sweetbells leucothoe, Fetter-Bush  
*Family:* Ericaceae  
*Plant type:* shrub  
*USDA hardiness zones:* 5B through 9 (Fig. 1)  
*Planting month for zone 7:* year round  
*Planting month for zone 8:* year round  
*Planting month for zone 9:* year round  
*Origin:* native to Florida  
*Uses:* mass planting; ground cover; border  
*Availability:* grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

**Description**

*Height:* 4 to 6 feet  
*Spread:* 4 to 6 feet  
*Plant habit:* spreading  
*Plant density:* dense  
*Growth rate:* moderate  
*Texture:* medium

**Foliage**

*Leaf arrangement:* alternate  
*Leaf type:* simple  
*Leaf margin:* serrate; serrulate  
*Leaf shape:* ovate  
*Leaf venation:* pinnate

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Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: purple
Fall characteristic: showy

**Flower**
Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; inconspicuous and not showy

**Fruit**
Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

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

**Culture**
Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: 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: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

**Use and Management**
Sweetbells leucothoe grows well in full sun and shade, and it will tolerate moist to dry, rich, acid soils. One may wish to rejuvenate this plant every few years by pruning it to the ground after flowering has ceased.

The propagation of *Leucothoe racemosa* is by seeds and cuttings.