

Osmanthus fragrans: Sweet Osmanthus¹

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Introduction

This large evergreen shrub or small tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height and width but is most often seen at 10 to 12 feet high with an 8-foot-spread. Older plants grow as wide as tall and develop a vase shape with several main trunks typically originating close to the ground. The lustrous, medium-green leaves have paler undersides and are joined from October through March by a multitude of small, but extremely fragrant, white blossoms. They

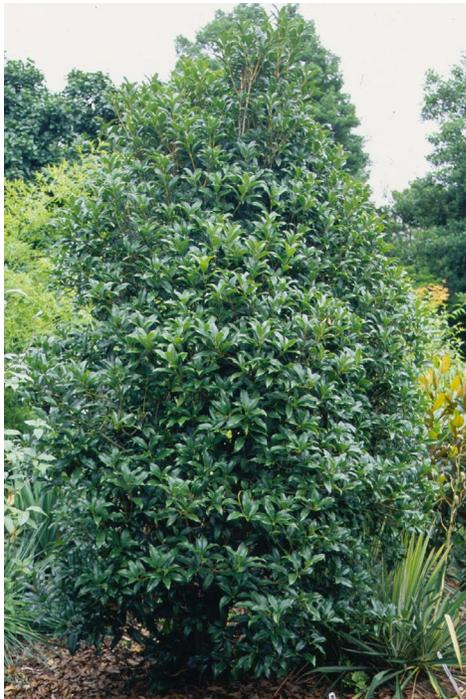


Figure 1. Mature *Osmanthus fragrans*: Sweet Osmanthus
Credits: Ed Gilman

perfume a large area of the landscape and can be showy in some years.

General Information

Scientific name: *Osmanthus fragrans*

Pronunciation: oz-MANTH-us FRAY-granz

Common name(s): Sweet Osmanthus

Family: *Oleaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 9B (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: hedge; screen; deck or patio

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

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Description

Height: 15 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: columnar, upright/erect, round

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: spiny, serrate, pectinate

Leaf shape: oblong, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen, evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

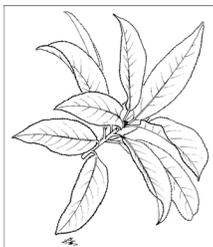


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: blue, 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: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

With its upright oval to columnar growth habit in youth, Sweet Osmanthus is ideal for use as an unclipped hedge or trained as a small tree, and should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. Since the flowers are not particularly showy, people will wonder where the delightful fragrance is coming from. This is a subtle plant which should be used more often in Southern landscapes.

Plants thin somewhat in the partial shade, but form a dense crown in a sunny location. Planted on 4 to 6 foot centers, Sweet Osmanthus can form a wall of fragrance during the fall, winter and spring and should be planted more often. They will not grow as fast as Leyland Cypress, but think of this Osmanthus as a substitute for use in a sunny spot. Plants can be clipped to form a denser canopy, but flowers form on old growth and removing branches will reduce the flower display. With time, older plants can be trained into a small, multi-trunked tree.

Sweet Osmanthus should be grown in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil. Plants are fairly drought-tolerant once established but will perform their best with ample moisture.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Scales and nematodes may present a problem, and mushroom root rot is troublesome when the soil is kept too wet.

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>