

# Clethra alnifolia

## Sweet Pepperbush, Summersweet

Tried and True  
Native Plant Selections  
for the Mid-Atlantic

Summer sweet and spicy is the pleasant fragrance of this pollinator magnet that naturalizes readily in shady, damp places as well as coastal landscapes. Although not native to NoVA (it is common in the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain\*), it grows well in cultivation here. The Virginia Native Plant Society honored Sweet Pepperbush as Wildflower of the Year in 2015.



Shrub	Shrub Border, Flowers with Pollinator,** Fruit
Height: 6–12 feet	
Spread: 3–6 feet	
Bloom Color: White (pink <a href="#">cultivars</a> )	
Characteristics	
Upright to rounded, twiggy <a href="#">deciduous</a> shrub	
<a href="#">Alternate</a> , <a href="#">obovate</a> , glossy leaves w/ toothed margins	
Intensely scented, creamy white flowers on erect <a href="#">racemes</a> bloom July and August on new growth	
Green turning brown, 3-valved, <a href="#">loculicidal capsules</a> set September–October and <a href="#">persist</a> over winter	
Yellow autumn foliage	
Brown to taupe to gray <a href="#">bark</a> , exfoliating with age	
Often <a href="#">suckers</a> to form broad colonies	
Attributes	
Tolerates <a href="#">clay</a> & wet soils, dense shade (where it will flower), and salt (moderate); no serious pests or diseases; <a href="#">deer</a> seldom severely damage	
Attracts bees, hummers, butterflies; birds & small mammals to fruit; <a href="#">larval</a> host to ~10 <a href="#">lepidopterans</a>	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
<a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : Average	<a href="#">Buddleia davidii</a> and hybrids - Butterfly Bush
<a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun, Partial Shade, Shade	<a href="#">Lythrum salicaria</a> - Purple Loosestrife
<a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Moist, Wet	<a href="#">Nandina domestica</a> - Nandina
Grows in full sun, but prefers dappled shade	<a href="#">Rosa multiflora</a> - Multiflora Rose
To contain spread, remove suckers as they appear	<a href="#">Spirea japonica</a> - Japanese Spirea
Any pruning should occur in late winter	<a href="#">Vitex agnus-castus</a> - Chaste Tree
Use in borders, near foundations, in butterfly, hummer, or rain gardens, or to control erosion	*It is not <a href="#">native</a> to DC or NoVA. In DE, MD, and VA, it is common in the Coastal Plain and rare in the (outer) Piedmont. In PA, it is found occasionally in the far eastern counties.
<a href="#">Hardiness</a> : USDA Zones 3a–9b	**A bumble bee sips nectar from a flower.

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Images by Elaine Mills, Meadowlark Botanical Gardens and U.S. National Arboretum and by Mary Free (middle), Central Library Garden



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