

# 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="#">pinnate</a> medium to dark green leaves	
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 <a href="#">bark</a> , exfoliating with age	
Often <a href="#">suckers</a> to form broad colonies	
Attributes	
Tolerates clay soil, dense shade (where it will flower), and salt (moderate); no serious pests or diseases; deer seldom severely damage	
Excellent for attracting native bees, hummingbirds, & butterflies; birds & small mammals eat the fruit	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
<a href="#">Soil</a> Requirements: Average	<a href="#">Buddleia davidii</a> and hybrids - Butterfly Bush
Light Requirements: Sun, Partial Shade, Shade	<a href="#">Lythrum salicaria</a> - Purple Loosestrife
Water Requirements: Moist, Wet	<i>Rosa</i> species - Roses
Grows in full sun, but prefers dappled shade	<a href="#">Spirea japonica</a> - Japanese Spirea
To contain spread, remove root suckers as they appear; any pruning should occur in late winter	<i>Viburnum lantana</i> - Wayfaring Tree
Use in borders, near foundations, in butterfly, hummer, or rain gardens, or to control erosion	<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i> - Chaste Tree
Hardiness: USDA Zones 3–9	*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