

# Cephalanthus occidentalis

## Buttonbush

Tried and True  
Native Plant Selections  
for the Mid-Atlantic

**Native\*** Buttonbush, a wildlife favorite, is so common it is often overlooked. However, those who frequent sites along ponds and rivers likely recognize its sweet-scented, one-inch flower heads—suggestive of round pincushions when in bloom in summer. The Virginia Native Plant Society honored Buttonbush as Wildflower of the Year in 2022.



| Shrub   | Flowers,** Shrub with Fruit, Seed Heads***  |
|---|---|
| Height: 6–12 feet   |   |
| Spread: 6–10 feet   |   |
| Bloom Color: Creamy white   |   |
| Characteristics   |   |
| <a href="#">Deciduous</a> shrub with rounded, irregular form  |   |
| Mostly <a href="#">opposite</a> , ovate, glossy, medium green leaves  |   |
| Round heads of densely-packed, fragrant, tubular flowers w/ long exserted <a href="#">styles</a> early to midsummer   |   |
| Seed heads of pyramid-shaped <a href="#">nutlets</a> mature from pinkish-red to brown and <a href="#">persist</a> into winter                               |   |
| Inconsequential yellow autumn foliage   |   |
| Attributes  |   |
| Tolerates floods (up to 36"); intolerant of drought   |   |
| No serious pests or diseases  |   |
| <a href="#">Deer</a> occasionally severely damage   |   |
| Attractive winter silhouette  |   |
| Attracts bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, song-birds, waterfowl; <a href="#">larval</a> host for Hydrangea and Titan sphinxes and Beautiful Wood-nymph moth |   |
| Growing and Maintenance Tips  |   |
| <a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : Average to rich   | <b>Excellent Replacement for</b>  |
| <a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun, Partial Shade, Shade (but needs sun to flower)  | <a href="#">Berberis thunbergii</a> - Japanese Barberry   |
| <a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Moist, Wet   | <a href="#">Buddleia davidii</a> and hybrids - Butterfly Bush   |
| Fast-growing and can be heavily pruned to control height and spread   | <a href="#">Ligustrum japonicum &amp; L. sinense</a> - Privets  |
| Reshape in spring and remove any dead growth  | <a href="#">Nandina domestica</a> - Nandina   |
| Use in shrub borders, rain gardens, or naturalized  | <p>*It is mostly frequent-to-common throughout the Mid-Atlantic Region except in some of the northern counties of PA.<br/>**Pollinators pictured are a two-spotted bumble bee (top) and a European honey bee (middle).<br/>*** Seed heads mid-July and early January (bottom, far right).</p> |
| <a href="#">Hardiness</a> : USDA Zones 5–9  |   |

developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria

Images by Mary Free, Glencarlyn Library Community, Central Library, & Simpson Park Demonstration Gardens



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

