FPS95
doi.org/10.32473/edis-fp095-1999

Calycanthus floridus: Carolina Allspice, Sweetshrub[1]

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This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/ *to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.*

Introduction

Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) is a woody deciduous shrub native to the southeastern United States, but it is considered endangered in Florida. This plant is commonly found in mesic sites, forested areas, and near the banks of water bodies. It has a rounded growth form and can reach a height of 9 feet and spread of 12 feet (Figure 1). The large leaves have a leathery texture, exhibit some fall coloration, and are aromatic when crushed (Figures 2 and 3). Showy flowers occur in spring, are maroon to brown in coloration, have strap-like petals, and exhibit a strong fragrance similar to that of strawberries; however, the scent may vary between plants (Figures 4 and 5). The flowers are located within the foliage of the plant and may often be obscured from view. In fall, this plant produces seeds in a brown urceolate capsule (Figure 6). Carolina allspice is well suited for an informal landscape, screen or hedge, foundation plant or specimen, or as a part of a native or pollinator garden.



Figure 1. Full form—*Calycanthus floridus*: Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: © jlouya, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Calycanthus floridus*: Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: © Evelyn Davis, some rights reserved (CC BY) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Flower—*Calycanthus floridus*: Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: © wagnerjb, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Leaf, fall color—*Calycanthus floridus*: Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

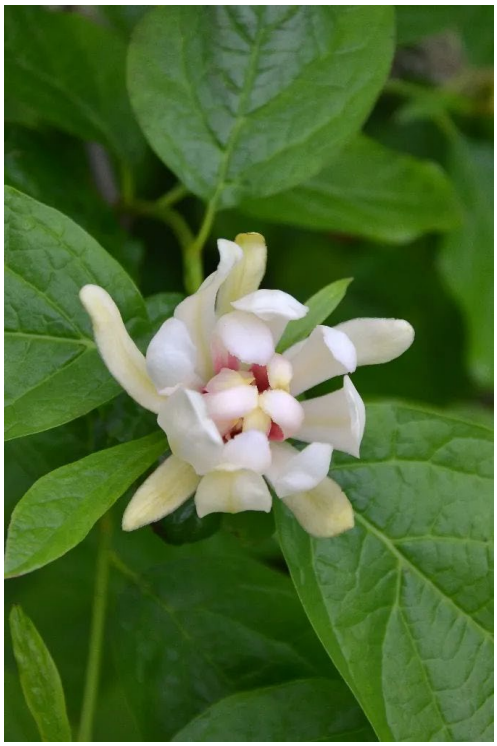


Figure 5. Flower—*Calycanthus floridus* 'Venus': Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: Mariana via Adobe Stock

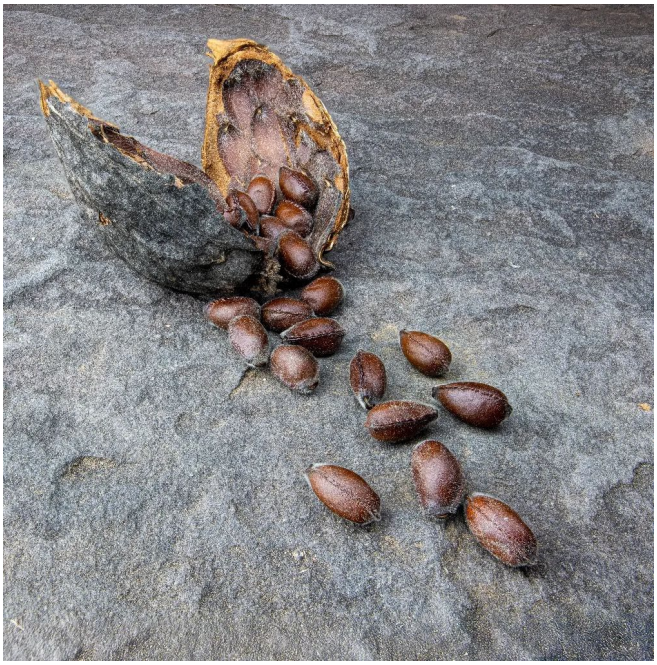


Figure 6. Fruit—*Calycanthus floridus*: Carolina allspice, sweetshrub.
Credit: Gerry via Adobe Stock

General Information

Scientific name: *Calycanthus floridus*

Pronunciation: kal-lick-KANTH-us FLOR-rid-us

Common name(s): sweetshrub, strawberry-bush, Carolina allspice, eastern sweetshrub

Family: *Calycanthaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 4A through 9A (Figures 7 and 8)

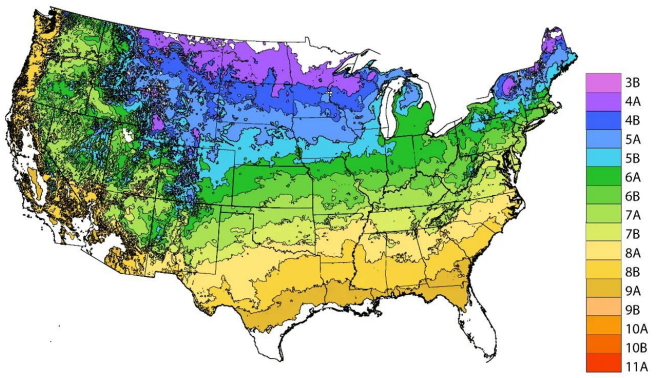


Figure 7. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 4A–9A.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

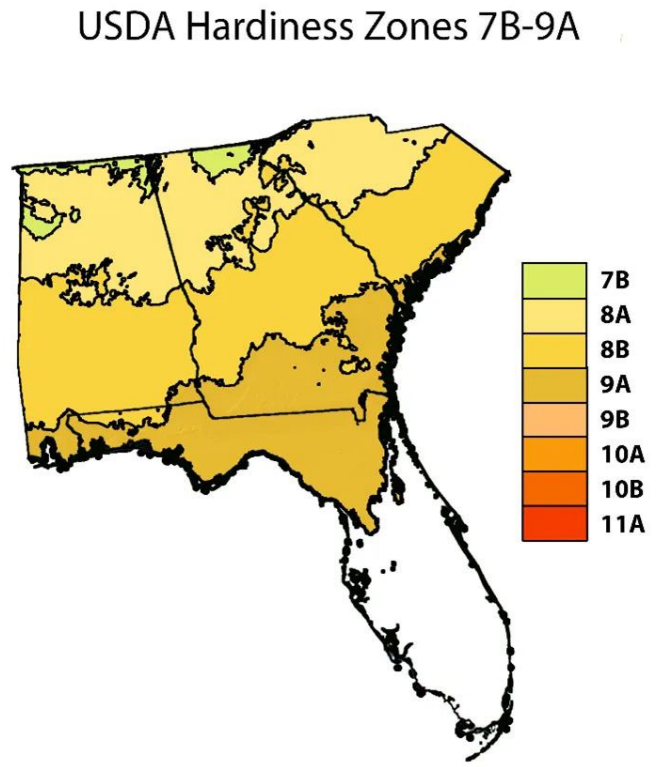


Figure 8. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 7B–9A.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

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

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive; has a suckering growth habit

Uses: screen; espalier; specimen; hedge; foundation; border; naturalizing

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 6 to 9 feet

Spread: 6 to 12 feet

Plant habit: round; oval

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: fragrant; deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: red; white

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: urceolate

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green; brown when mature

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multitrunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in the shade

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Toxicity: this plant exhibits low toxic characteristics; the seeds contain calycanthin and related alkaloids; seeds cause issues if ingested

Use and Management

Carolina allspice grows well in full sun to partial shade. It is highly adaptable to soil conditions but prefers moist, well-drained soil. This plant can also tolerate both flooding and drought and is cold tolerant. It is also resistant to browsing from herbivores. This plant may be used in a variety of ways in the landscape. The upright, oval shape and attractive foliage make Carolina allspice an excellent candidate for the back of a shrub border or for use as a screen. It also makes a good addition to a native or pollinator garden, may be used in a shade garden, as an informal hedge, or as a specimen or foundation plant. Cultivars are available with white flowers, various growth habits, and highly fragrant flowers. This plant may be difficult to source but should be available at native plant nurseries.

Several trunks form from the base of the plant and sprouts often grow from roots forming many trunks. This plant may have a somewhat aggressive growth habit, spreading by rooting suckers, and has a naturalizing effect in the landscape. Pruning these suckers may be needed to keep the plant within bounds. It can be sheared or thinned, depending on the desired use. Pruning and training the plant to several upright stems can create an attractive specimen plant. A height of 9 feet and spread of 12 feet can be expected; however, the plant tends to be slightly larger in the shade.

Propagation is by division or cuttings.

Design Considerations

Use as a fragrant specimen near patios/entries, as a loose screen or hedge, or as an understory mass along woodland edges. The flowers have a distinct, fruity fragrance often compared to strawberries or pineapples. Therefore, plant it near patios, benches, open windows, or along primary walkways where the scent can be enjoyed up close.

As a multi-stemmed deciduous shrub that grows 6–10 feet tall and wide, it serves several functions. Use it as a specimen plant in a shaded corner, as part of a mixed shrub border for woodland gardens, or allow its suckering habit to form a dense, naturalized screen or informal hedge. Its high deer-resistance makes it a reliable choice for areas with browsing pressure.

Pair it with other natives that enjoy similar moist, woodland conditions. The fine textures of ferns like cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) or southern shield fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*) contrast beautifully with its large, glossy leaves. For a layered planting, use it with oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and Florida anise (*Illicium floridanum*), which share its love for partial shade and provide extended seasonal interest.

Pests and Diseases

No pest issues of major concern. Disease issues include bacterial crown gall (causes warty growths near soil line; no treatment is available and plants must be destroyed), and powdery mildew (white coating on leaves).

[1] This document is FPS95, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised March 2023 and February 2026. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/.*

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