Osmanthus americanus
Devilwood

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

A native to the southeastern United States, Devilwood is a very attractive, small evergreen tree which is most commonly seen at 15 to 25 feet in height and sports lush, dark, olive green leaves throughout the year (Fig. 1). It is occasionally seen 30 to 40 feet tall in its native habitat and grows slowly. The clusters of small, white, fragrant, early springtime flowers are followed by the production of small, dark blue drupes, ripening in fall and persisting on the tree until the following spring, if not first consumed by birds and other wildlife. Its ease of growth, pest-resistance, attractive foliage and flowers, and wildlife-attracting fruits would make Devilwood a popular choice for naturalizing or the mixed shrubbery border. The trees tolerate heavy pruning particularly well and may also be used as a hedge. Devilwood is so-named because the fine-textured wood is difficult to split and hard to work.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Osmanthus americanus
Pronunciation: oz-MANTH-us uh-mair-ih-KAY-nus
Common name(s): Devilwood, Wild-Olive
Family: Oleaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 9 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round; vase shape

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); lanceolate; ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** blue

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green
Current year twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Naturally found along streambanks or swamp margins, Devilwood should be grown in full sun or partial shade on moist, well-drained soil. Drought tolerance is moderate once established. The tree is probably as shade tolerant as any osmanthus. Not tested as an urban tree but may have some merit in wet soils.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.