**Osmanthus fragrans**  
*Sweet Osmanthus*¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

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**INTRODUCTION**

This large evergreen shrub or small tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height and width but is most often seen at 10 to 12 feet high with an 8-foot spread (Fig. 1). Older plants grow as wide as tall and develop a vase shape with several main trunks typically originating close to the ground. The lustrous, medium-green leaves have paler undersides and are joined from October through March by a multitude of small, but extremely fragrant, white blossoms. They perfume a large area of the landscape and can be showy in some years.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Scientific name: *Osmanthus fragrans*  
Pronunciation: oz-MANTH-us FRAY-granz  
Common name(s): Sweet Osmanthus  
Family: Oleaceae  
USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 9 (Fig. 2)  
Origin: not native to North America  
Uses: hedge; near a deck or patio; screen; no proven urban tolerance  
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**DESCRIPTION**

Height: 15 to 30 feet  
Spread: 15 to 20 feet  
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms  
Crown shape: columnar; upright

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**Flower**

*Flower color:* white  
*Flower characteristics:* fall flowering; pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering; winter flowering

**Fruit**

*Fruit shape:* round  
*Fruit length:* < .5 inch  
*Fruit covering:* fleshy  
*Fruit color:* black; blue  
*Fruit characteristics:* does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns  
*Pruning requirement:* needs little pruning to develop a strong structure  
*Breakage:* resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

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

**Other**

*Roots:* surface roots are usually not a problem  
*Winter interest:* tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
*Outstanding tree:* not particularly outstanding  
*Invasive potential:* little, if any, potential at this time  
*Pest resistance:* long-term health usually not affected by pests

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**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.
USE AND MANAGEMENT

With its upright oval to columnar growth habit in youth, Sweet Osmanthus is ideal for use as an unclipped hedge or trained as a small tree, and should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. Since the flowers are not particularly showy, people will wonder where the delightful fragrance is coming from. This is a subtle plant which should be used more often in Southern landscapes.

Plants thin somewhat in the partial shade, but form a dense crown in a sunny location. Planted on 4 to 6 foot centers, Sweet Osmanthus can form a wall of fragrance during the fall, winter and spring and should be planted more often. They will not grow as fast as Leyland Cypress, but think of this Osmanthus as a substitute for use in a sunny spot. Plants can be clipped to form a denser canopy, but flowers form on old growth and removing branches will reduce the flower display. With time, older plants can be trained into a small, multi-trunked tree.

Sweet Osmanthus should be grown in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil. Plants are fairly drought-tolerant once established but will perform their best with ample moisture.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Scales and nematodes may present a problem, and mushroom root rot is troublesome when the soil is kept too wet.