**Viburnum odoratissimum var. awabuki**  
**Awabuki Sweet Viburnum**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

Large, leathery, medium to light green, highly lustrous leaves and clusters of extremely fragrant, small, white flowers, completely covering the plant in springtime, make Awabuki Sweet Viburnum a plant with great potential (Fig. 1). The shiny leaves are quite distinctive from the dull, dark green, blunt-tip leaves of the species. For some reason, the species has fallen out of favor as a small tree in recent years, but it is often used as a screen or clipped hedge. Its dense, spreading, evergreen habit makes Sweet Viburnum suitable for use as a small tree, reaching only about 15 to 20 feet at maturity, with an open, multibranched, rounded canopy. The flowers are often followed by small, showy red berries which are highly ornamental and turn black when ripe. This is a small tree which should be tried, and some nursery operators are beginning to grow it. Thirty-year-old plants grow to about 18 feet tall and wide.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki*  
**Pronunciation:** vye-BER-num  
oh-duh-ruh-TISS-ih-num variety aw-wah-BOO-kee  
**Common name(s):** Awabuki Sweet Viburnum  
**Family:** Caprifoliaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; 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; screen; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance  
**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

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**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 15 to 20 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:** round  
**Crown density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** slow  
**Texture:** coarse  

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)  
**Leaf venation:** bowed; banchiodrome; pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen; evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 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:** round  
**Fruit length:** < .5 inch  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** black; red  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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:** requires pruning to develop strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant

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![Map showing potential planting range](image-url)  

*Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.*
Viburnum odoratissimum var. awabuki -- Awabuki Sweet Viburnum

**Current year twig color:** 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; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

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**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

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

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

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Sweet Viburnum grows quickly in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of soils. Relatively maintenance-free, Sweet Viburnum grown as a tree will require only occasional pruning to control size and shape. This would be a good tree for planting along a street where power lines or other obstructions limit overhead space.

The cultivar ‘Emerald Lustre’ has larger leaves and ‘Nanum’ is a dwarf form.

Propagation is by cuttings or layerings.

**Pests**

This tree is usually free of pests.

Viburnum aphid is gray to dark green and feeds in clusters at the tips of the branches, causing leaf curl. The insects can be dislodged with high pressure water spray from the garden hose.

Inspect the stems of unhealthy-looking plants for possible scale infestations. If found, spray with horticultural oil for some control.

Caterpillars eat holes in the new foliage. This may be more troublesome in the nursery than in the landscape.

Thrips, mites, white-fly, bagworms, and sooty mold are also problems, but none are normally serious.

**Diseases**

Bacterial leafspot causes round, water-soaked spots on leaves and young stems. These develop into shrunken, brown areas about 1/8-inch in diameter. Destroy infected leaves.
Bacterial crown gall forms galls on the lower stems. Do not replant in the same spot.

Shoot blight causes grayish to brown decayed spots on the leaves. The spots first appear at the leaf margins, then spread to the rest of the leaf. Infected flower clusters or twigs are killed.

A number of fungi cause leaf spots. Rake up and destroy infected leaves.

Downy mildew and powdery mildew cause a white powdery growth on the leaves.