
Wildflower Spot – June 2007
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

SWEETSPIRE

Itea virginica

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Sweetspire is a small shrub, to 6 feet tall, covered with 4-inch white flower-spears in late spring. The fall color is spectacular and long-lasting, the leaves a mix of yellow, orange, crimson and maroon. Cultivars have larger and longer flower spikes, and more compact growth habit.



Sweetspire grows in full sun to part shade and is relatively free of pests. It is found chiefly on the coastal plain in swamps and wet woods, from southern New Jersey to Florida and west to east Texas.

An extremely useful landscape plant, Sweetspire will grow under eaves where there is no air circulation and no drainage. But it is happier as a small, mass planting put by a deck, on the edge of a lawn, or on the fringe of a wooded area. By a creek, Sweetspire provides

SWEET PEPPERBUSH

Clethra alnifolia



invaluable erosion control and, with its feet wet, will produce even better fall color.

When the blooms of Sweetspire are fading, Sweet Pepperbush has begun to flower and continues into summer. In addition to being one of the few summer flowering shrubs, Sweet Pepperbush also has a long season of lovely fall leaf color. While the long white flower “spikes” of both plants are superficially similar, the flowers of Sweet Pepperbush produce outstanding fragrance, like fine French perfume. Both are small shrubs which like part shade, acid and moist soil; Sweet Pepperbush tolerates difficult shady spots and thrives in wet, even soggy conditions. Both are favorites of butterflies and birds.

Both shrubs have fine-toothed leaves. Those of Sweetspire are oval and light green whereas the leaves of Sweet Pepperbush are darker green, narrow at the base and wide in the middle. ❖