Leucothoe racemosa

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Introduction

Sweetbells Leucothoe is a small, deciduous shrub that grows 4 to 6½ feet tall and wide. The tiny, membranous, bright green leaves of this plant turn red in the fall of the year. This plant will begin to produce its magnificent flowers in May and will continue to bloom until June. The lovely, white, urceolate flowers of Sweetbells Leucothoe occur in very long horizontal racemes, and they have a very pleasant fragrance. The fruits of these shrubs are capsules; they are light brown and inconspicuous. This plant is excellent near patios and in home gardens.

General Information

Scientific name: Leucothoe racemosa
Pronunciation: loo-KAHTH-oh-ee race-MOE-suh
Common name(s): Dog-Hobble, Sweetbells Leucothoe, Fetter-Bush
Family: Ericaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 9 (Fig. 1)
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
Uses: mass planting; ground cover; border
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet
Spread: 4 to 6 feet
Plant habit: spreading
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate; serrulate
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: purple
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy
Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay;
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

Sweetbells Leucothoe grows well in full sun and shade, and it will tolerate moist to dry, rich, acid soils. One may wish to rejuvenate this plant every few years by pruning it to the ground after flowering has ceased.

The propagation of Leucothoe racemosa is by seeds and cuttings.
Pests and Diseases

Leaf spots may cause Sweetbells Leucothoe to look undesirable; at least 8 species of fungi infect Leucothoe spp. When this plant is grown in conditions that are not ideal, leaf spot will produce ugly lesions that often enlarge and consume the entire leaf. Root rot problems may also occur.