



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Leucothoe racemosa*¹

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Introduction

Sweetbells *Leucothoe* is a small, deciduous shrub that grows 4 to 6 ½ 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

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Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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.