



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Lyonia ferruginea*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Rusty Lyonia is a Florida native shrub or small tree that reaches a height of 10 to 20 feet. This evergreen plant is distinguished from other members of the heath family by a rusty pubescence that is present on all parts of the plant. The pubescence is especially prominent on the leaf underside and reportedly works to protect new growth from harmful insects. *Lyonia ferruginea* has leaves that are elliptic or oblanceolate in shape, and they are usually tipped with a sharp point. The fragrant flowers of this plant occur in small axillary clusters and are white in color. These flowers are followed by light brown capsules that are approximately 1/2 of an inch long. The bark on the crooked trunks and irregularly spreading branches is reddish brown, scaly and ridged.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Lyonia ferruginea*

**Pronunciation:** lye-OH-nee-uh fair-roo-JIN-nee-uh

**Common name(s):** Rusty Lyonia, Stagger-Bush

**Family:** *Ericaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 10 (Fig. 1)

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10:** year round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Uses:** border; foundation; reclamation plant; near a deck or patio

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

### Description

**Height:** 10 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 4 to 10 feet

**Plant habit:** round

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

#### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** oblanceolate

**Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

#### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering

#### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit cover:** dry or hard

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Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Fruit color:** unknown

**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:** green

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

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

**Use and Management**

Rusty Lyonia has no real outstanding ornamental traits, but can be used in poorly-drained sites where other plants suffer.

*Lyonia ferruginea* needs to be planted in an area of the landscape that receives sun for most or all of the day. It is found in the wild in both poorly drained pine flatwoods and in well-drained sand pine-oak scrub. This plant is drought resistant and will grow on dry, acid, sandy soils; it is well suited for use in unirrigated landscapes. *Lyonia lucida* (Fetterbush) is closely related and adapted to similar soils.

### **Pests and Diseases**

No major pests or diseases are normally seen on this plant. A caterpillar may cause partial defoliation but will do no lasting harm.