



# *Osmanthus fragrans* Sweet Osmanthus<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This large evergreen shrub or small tree is capable of reaching 20 to 25 feet in height and width but is most often seen at 10 to 12 feet high with an 8-foot-spread (Fig. 1). Older plants grow as wide as tall and develop a vase shape with several main trunks typically originating close to the ground. The lustrous, medium-green leaves have paler undersides and are joined from October through March by a multitude of small, but extremely fragrant, white blossoms. They perfume a large area of the landscape and can be showy in some years.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Osmanthus fragrans*

**Pronunciation:** oz-MANTH-us FRAY-granz

**Common name(s):** Sweet Osmanthus

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** hedge; near a deck or patio; screen; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 15 to 30 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:** columnar; upright

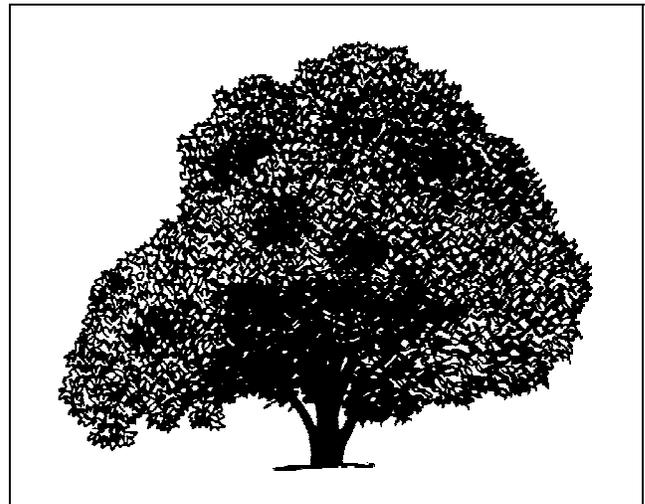


Figure 1. Mature Sweet Osmanthus.

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** pectinate; serrate; spiny

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); oblong

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

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

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-425, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** fall flowering; pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering; winter flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** < .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** black; blue

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

**Other**

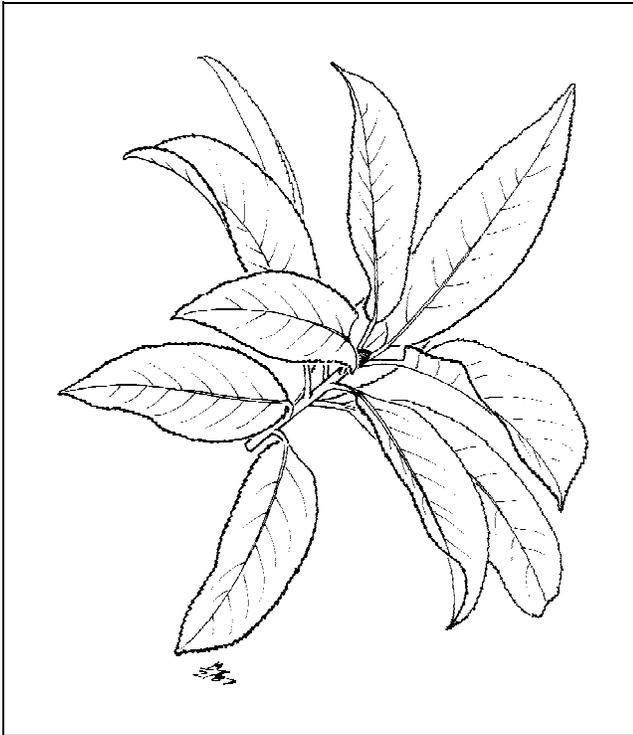
**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

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



**Figure 3.** Foliage of Sweet Osmanthus.

### **Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Scales and nematodes may present a problem, and mushroom root rot is troublesome when the soil is kept too wet.

### **USE AND MANAGEMENT**

With its upright oval to columnar growth habit in youth, Sweet Osmanthus is ideal for use as an unclipped hedge or trained as a small tree, and should be placed where its fragrance can be enjoyed. Since the flowers are not particularly showy, people will wonder where the delightful fragrance is coming from. This is a subtle plant which should be used more often in Southern landscapes.

Plants thin somewhat in the partial shade, but form a dense crown in a sunny location. Planted on 4 to 6 foot centers, Sweet Osmanthus can form a wall of fragrance during the fall, winter and spring and should be planted more often. They will not grow as fast as Leyland Cypress, but think of this Osmanthus as a substitute for use in a sunny spot. Plants can be clipped to form a denser canopy, but flowers form on old growth and removing branches will reduce the flower display. With time, older plants can be trained into a small, multi-trunked tree.

Sweet Osmanthus should be grown in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil. Plants are fairly drought-tolerant once established but will perform their best with ample moisture.

Propagation is by cuttings.