



Viburnum odoratissimum Sweet Viburnum¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Large, leathery, dark green, glossy leaves and clusters of extremely fragrant, small, white flowers, completely covering the plant in springtime, make Sweet Viburnum a longtime landscape favorite (Fig. 1). The large, dull green leaves form a moderately coarse texture. For some reason, it has fallen out of favor as a small tree in recent years. This adaptable tree should be 'rediscovered' by landscape architects and others specifying small trees for urban and suburban landscapes. Often used as a screen or clipped hedge, its dense, spreading, evergreen habit makes Sweet Viburnum suitable for use as a small tree, reaching 25 to 30 feet tall and wide at maturity, with a dense, multibranched, rounded canopy. The flowers are often followed by small, red berries which turn black when ripe and are moderately showy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Viburnum odoratissimum*

Pronunciation: vye-BER-num
oh-duh-ruh-TISS-ih-mum

Common name(s): Sweet Viburnum

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 10A (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; shade

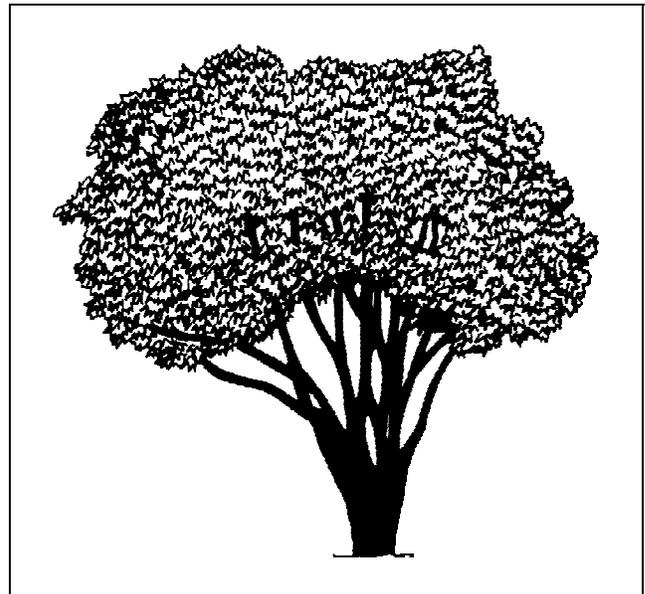


Figure 1. Mature Sweet Viburnum.

tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire; serrate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering (Fig. 3)

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: black; red

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: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

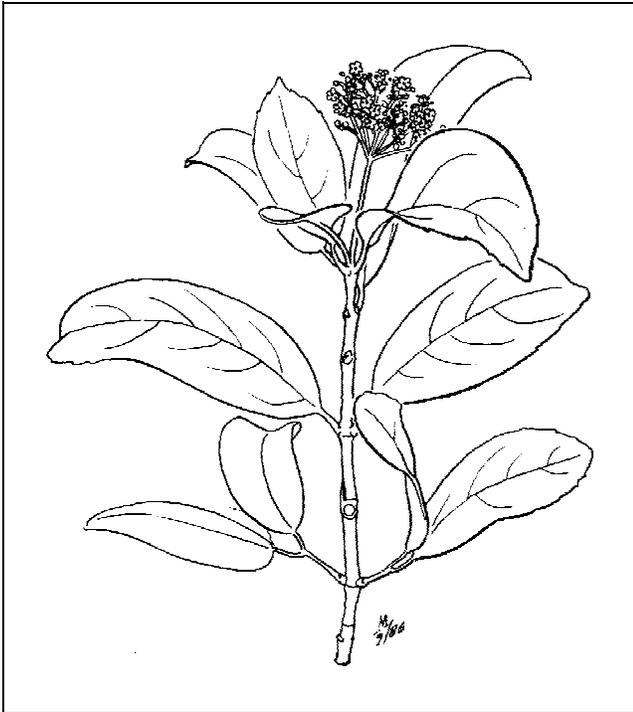


Figure 3. Flower of Sweet Viburnum.

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Culture

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

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

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

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

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

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Sweet Viburnum grows quickly in full sun or partial shade on a wide variety of soils. It is tolerant to drought, holding up very well in unirrigated landscapes once established. Relatively maintenance-free, Sweet Viburnum grown as a tree will require

pruning to control size and shape. A nice, neat, compact canopy develops without any training. Interior sprouts and branches need to be removed to make the trunk show. Only lower branches need removal to allow for pedestrian and vehicle clearance beneath the crown. This would be a good tree for planting along a street where power lines or other obstructions limit overhead space. Nurseries should be encouraged to grow this adaptable plant as a tree form in addition to the shrub form commonly available. It can be trained to one trunk or grown as a multi-stemmed specimen.

The cultivar 'Emerald Lustre' has larger leaves and 'Nanum' is a dwarf form. *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki* has large glossy leaves and flower panicles, and beautiful red berries.

Propagation is by cuttings or layerings.

Pests

This tree is usually fairly pest-free.

Viburnum aphid is gray to dark green and feeds in clusters at the tips of the branches, causing leaf curl. The insects can be dislodged with high pressure water spray from the garden hose. They usually cause little or no appreciable damage.

Inspect the stems of unhealthy-looking plants for possible scale infestations. If found, spray with horticultural oil for some control.

Sweet Viburnum is also infested by thrips, mites, white-fly, bagworms, and sooty mold, but none are normally serious.

Diseases

Bacterial leafspot causes round, water-soaked spots on leaves and young stems. These develop into shrunken, brown areas about 1/8-inch in diameter. Destroy infected leaves.

Bacterial crown gall forms galls on the lower stems. Do not replant in the same spot.

Shoot blight causes grayish to brown decayed spots on the leaves. The spots first appear at the leaf margins, then spread to the rest of the leaf. Infected flower clusters or twigs are killed.

A number of fungi cause leaf spots. Leaf spots are not usually serious diseases. Rake up and destroy infected leaves, if you wish.

Downy mildew and powdery mildew cause a white powdery growth on the leaves but usually cause only cosmetic damage of little consequence.