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Osmanthus fragrans

Fragrant Tea Olive

Cheryl Swanson, SRCMGV Intern



Flowering Tea Olive. Cheryl Swanson

Fragrant tea olive tree, a popular evergreen shrub in Southern gardens, is known for its small but very sweet, fragrant flowers which bloom in the spring as well as the fall. It is a member of the olive family (Oleaceae) and is native to China, Japan, and South-east Asia. Common names include Tea Olive, Sweet Osmanthus, and Sweet Olive. It's genus name originates with the Greek words for fragrant (*osme*) and flower (*anthos*) and the species epithet (*fragrans*) means "fragrant." The blossoms have been described as apricot scented. Fragrant Tea Olive could also be classified as an edible because its flowers are used to infuse tea to add a floral aroma. The flowers are creamy white and grow in small clusters. Several cultivars are available, some with yellow or orange flowers (*O. fragrans f. aurantiacus*; 'Conger Yellow'). Leaves are leathery, smooth or finely toothed, and have an opposite/subopposite arrangement.



I was first introduced to the Tea Olive at a local nursery while looking for a fairly large plant to use as a hedge along our backyard fence in a large open and sunny space. Tea Olives range in height from 15 to 20 feet but more often range in height from 10 to 12 feet with a spread of 8 feet. While the Tea Olive is not a showy plant, I was attracted to its size, the promise of aromatic flowers, its lower price compared to some alternatives, and the fact that it did not shed massive amounts of leaves as do the magnolias and oaks that also share space in the yard. Clean-up is challenging with the existing trees, and the Tea Olive seemed relatively carefree, requiring little pruning as well as being drought tolerant. For me it was the right plant for the right place, and I purchased four of them. Although scale and nematodes may present problems, these slow growing shrubs (approximately one foot per year) have been pest free for three years since they were planted. A complete fertilizer should be applied in the spring with slow-release nitrogen.

Tea Olives like full sun to partial shade; can tolerate clay, sandy, and loamy soils; prefer acidic soil; and need to be planted in a well-drained environment. They have a low aerosol salt tolerance. Their USDA hardiness zone is 7B through 9B and they are subject to frost damage. Since being planted, these shrubs have weathered two particularly cold winters. I protected them with outdoor plant covers with draw string enclosures and fabric that allowed for light and air transmittance. The plants experienced only slight frost damage on some of the leaf tips which may have resulted from the cloth pressing too closely on the leaves. Damaged tips were easily pruned when winter passed.

One disappointment is that when flowering, my *Osmanthus fragrans* does not have the intense scent this plant is known for. Apparently, others have experienced this as well. A consumer horticulture specialist with the Louisiana State University (LSU) Agricultural Center has suggested that the fragrance tends to be stronger and more longer lasting in older rather than younger shrubs.

He suggests that when purchasing a Tea Olive, make sure to select the right cultivar. However, for my purposes, I have been more than happy with a large shrub that fits the site and does not require a great deal of maintenance.



Osmanthus fragrans var. *aurantiacus*.
Leaves & Flowers - Wake Co., NC.
Photo credit: Cathy DeWitt,

References

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ST425>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/osmanthus-fragrans/>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/tea-olive/>

<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/trees-and-shrubs/shrubs/tea-olive/>

<https://www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/planglois/articles/sweet%20olive%20tree>

"Good advice withstands the test of time."

This article was written by Daniel E. Mullins,
Extension Horticultural Agent, SRC, retired

IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW HOW TREES GROW



What happens to a birdhouse if you hang it on a tree and come back in two years? Will it be at the same height or out of your reach because the tree has grown? Knowing how trees grow can help you answer this and other questions.

Tree growth only occurs at meristems. A meristem is a tissue that contains cells which have the capacity to divide and make new cells. Tree growth above ground includes shoot elongation (height growth), leaf growth, and diameter growth.

Shoots elongate at the tips of branches from apical meristems. Diameter growth occurs between the wood and bark from a thin layer of dividing cells, a meristem, called the vascular cambium. Wood is created on the inside of the cambium and bark is formed on the outside. There are wood cells, called the xylem, that carry water and minerals up from the roots. And there are bark cells, called the phloem, that carry sugars and other materials produced by the tree. As the tree expands in diameter, the outer bark has to give, forming ridges and cracks. Eventually the outer bark sloughs off. Tree roots grow in diameter through a similar process.

So, that birdhouse you hung on the tree will not move out of your reach because the tree only grows in height at the apical meristems located at the branch tips. At the height of the birdhouse only trunk diameter and limb diameter growth is occurring.

Yet trunk diameter growth is a factor worth considering. Have you ever seen someone, wanting to build close to a tree, cut a notch in the roof of their structure to accommodate the tree? Are they aware that the tree will grow in diameter? Similarly, root diameter growth can affect driveways or other structures we build over them.

More often than not, when people and trees tangle, it's the tree that loses. The average tree in a downtown city only lives thirteen years, one tenth the lifespan of an average tree on a rural site.

The urban environment is stressful on trees. Through construction activities we injure the critical tissues of trees, above-ground, but more usually below-ground. Tree roots typically extend just beneath the soil surface a distance three to four times the height of the tree. And even if we don't cut the tree roots, soil filled over them, or heavy machinery driven over them will destroy the oxygen-containing pore spaces in the soil. Not only is oxygen penetration into the soil decreased, so is penetration of water and nutrients. Because all of these elements are critical to tree growth, such damage begins a slow decline for the tree. This translates into reduced shoot growth, usually some limb dieback, and a shortened lifespan for the tree.

This article was written in 1994 Photo credit: Unsplash

Join a Local Plant Club!

Lois Scott, SRCMGV

**PLANT
CLUBS**

Pensacola Rose Society

<https://www.pensacolarosesociety.org/>

Meetings are normally held at 6:00pm on the second Monday of each month at the Pensacola Garden Center, 1850 N 9th Ave, Pensacola, FL 32503 Call (850) 475-5714

Florida Native Plant Society, The Longleaf Pine chapter

<https://longleafpine.fnpschapters.org/>

Meetings are currently held as a hybrid platform. Members and guests can attend in-person at our new meeting location, the Pensacola Mess Hall, 418 Wright St, Pensacola, or attend virtually over Zoom. Contact fnps.longleaf.pine@gmail.com to be added to the Zoom Invitation.

The Pensacola Camellia Club

<https://pensacolacamellioclub.com/>

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7pm at the Pensacola Garden Center - 1850 N 9th Ave. Club email: pensacolacamellia@gmail.com

Milton Garden Club

<https://gardenclubsnwfl.com/local-clubs/milton/>

Meetings are on the 2nd Tuesday of the month, August – May, beginning at 10:00 am
Magnolia Hall, 5256 Alabama Street, Milton, FL 32570

The Dogwood Garden Club, Gulf Breeze

<https://gardenclubsnwfl.com/local-clubs/dogwood/>

Meets 1st Tuesdays, September through May, 9:15 am at the of Gulf Breeze Presbyterian Church, 100 Andrew Jackson Trail, Gulf Breeze, Florida

Azalea Garden Club of Pace

<https://gardenclubsnwfl.com/local-clubs/azalea/>

6013 Jesse Allen Rd, Milton, FL Meets the second Monday of the month, August to May

Pensacola Garden Center

<https://www.pensacolagardencentre.com/>

Many garden “circles” meet at the Pensacola Garden Center, each at a different time and day. Check out the website for garden club options. Click on “join a circle” for more information.
1850 N 9th Ave., Pensacola FL, 32503, (850) 432-6095

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. joshua.criss@ufl.edu



Come see us at the
Milton Extension Office!
6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL 32570

Contact US: to subscribe to the Garden Connection or make a comment,

email us at MGVNEWSLET@gmail.com