**Tea Olive**
*Osmanthus fragrans*

**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. 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

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

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

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

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

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.

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by Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson