



# *Viburnum odoratissimum* Sweet Viburnum<sup>1</sup>

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

## 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

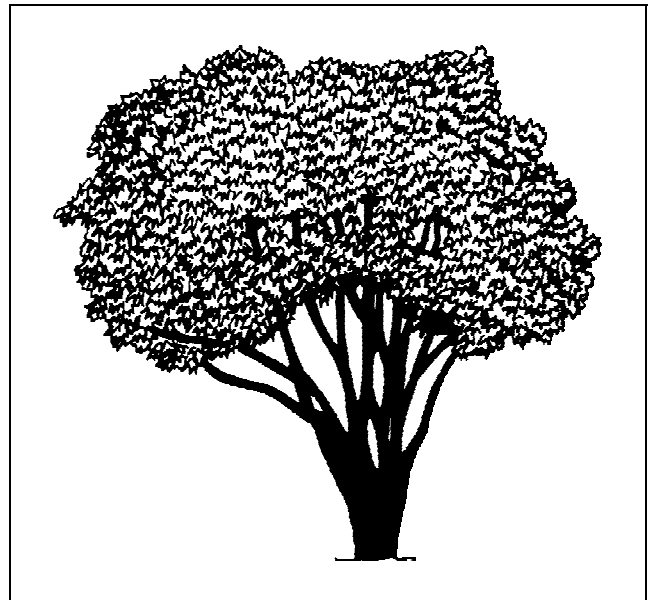


Figure 1. Mature Sweet Viburnum.

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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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



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.