

## Plant Profiles: HORT 2241 Landscape Plants I

**Botanical Name:** *Cephalanthus occidentalis*

**Common Name:** buttonbush

**Family Name:** Rubiaceae – madder family

**General Description:** Known primarily for its unique pincushion-like flowers, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* is native to the Chicago area and eastern United States where it grows in sunny, wetland habitats. The flowers attract bees and butterflies and the unusual button-like fruits provide a food source for many species of birds. It can grow as a small tree or large shrub, has glossy green leaves, and unique flowers that bloom throughout the summer. *Cephalanthus occidentalis* is an overlooked ornamental plant that merits more use in moist to wet landscape conditions.

**Zone:** 3-11

**Resources Consulted:**

Dirr, Michael A. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*. Champaign: Stipes, 2009. Print.

"The PLANTS Database." *USDA, NRCS*. National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA, 2014. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Swink, Floyd, and Gerould Wilhelm. *Plants of the Chicago Region*. Indianapolis: Indiana Academy of Science, 1994. Print.

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**Creation Date:** 2014

**Keywords/Tags:** *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, buttonbush, small tree, large shrub, flowering shrub, deciduous, native



**Whole plant/Habit:**

- Description: Buttonbush is typically a rounded, irregular shrub that can grow up to 8 foot in the landscape and larger in its native habitat.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: July 18, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_3723.png



#### Flower:

- Description: Flowers consist of clusters of creamy white flowers in a spherical head often referred to as a pincushion. The beauty of this plant is its long bloom time. *Cephalanthus* can bloom June – September and attract large numbers of bees and butterflies. Honey is often made from the nectar of this plant.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: July 18, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_3719.png



#### Fruit:

- Description: The flower clusters of summer give way in October to ball or button-like seed heads that persist through the winter.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: February 6, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_0054.png



#### Fruit:

- Description: The individual 2-seeded nutlets in the button-like cluster are highly desirable to a variety of birds.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: February 6, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_0053.png





#### Leaf:

- Description: Notice the glossy green leaves against the immature fruits! The leaves are deciduous, opposite or sometimes whorled, 2-6 inches long, and glossy. Leaves emerge late in spring; the plant looks dead until it finally begins to leaf out. Fall color is an unimpressive yellow.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: June 26, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_3239.png



#### Winter interest:

- Description: Buttonbush is not highly ornamental in winter due to the somewhat coarse and irregular branching pattern. The persistent seed heads add subtle winter interest.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: February 6, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_1100901.png



#### Special ID feature(s):

- Description: The summer blooming spherical, pincushion flowers and button-like seed heads are a dead giveaway for identification of *Cephalanthus*. The image shown here illustrates a color phase the fruit goes through as it matures.
- Image Source: Karren Wcisel, TreeTopics.com
- Image Date: September 11, 2009
- Image File Name: buttonbush\_5091.png