

Ask a Master Gardener
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Does Your Garden Make Scents?

Fragrance in plants was important historically in gardens, particularly in "grandma's garden" and Victorian gardens - and my garden. Over time, I have collected a few of the known and lesser known plants that make visitors ask, "What is that sweet perfume wafting through the air?" Well, it is more like, "What is that I smell?" I just like the term "wafting." Actually, conditions have to be just right for some fragrant plants to fill the garden with perfume.

Unfortunately, fragrance has been bred out of a lot of cultivars over the years but many gardeners are once again seeking this elusive quality. We Southerners can grow a lot of plants that will smell sweet throughout the year. Even in late winter, while those to the North are still shoveling snow, we can enjoy the heady fragrance of daphne and edgeworthia that roll in as we walk in the garden on those occasional warm days.

One of my joys and challenges as a gardener is finding plants that provide year round interest, especially during the winter. Edgeworthia chrysantha, common name Paper Bush or Rice Paper Plant is a deciduous shrub that provides winter interest in three different ways. Edgeworthia has showy bark and it blooms in winter with fragrant flowers. Above all of its attributes, Edgeworthia is prized for its fragrant flowers. The fragrance can be described as sweet like gardenia but spicier. Like its cousin Daphne, Edgeworthia's aroma perfumes the air over great distances. Edgeworthia flowers throughout the winter and its fragrance can be enjoyed from December to March. I took a picture of a butterfly visiting my Edgeworthia in February.

Daphne odora in my garden is the queen of fragrance. Mine bloom in January and February when little else is in flower, which only adds to its appeal. It is warned that the challenge is to keep her happy... and alive. "Daphnes across the board are fickle," said Michael Dirr, retired professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia. "They wither and die almost overnight." The best start gardeners can give *Daphne odora* is to choose a site that has partial shade and plant them in a slightly elevated mound in well-draining soil. After that, don't fuss over them and don't over water — err on the side of keeping them a little dry. Mulch also seems to be at the top of their list to be happy. Above all else, don't move them. They don't like being moved. Once they're established, they can be very tough, hardy plants. Actually, I have one that was in a pot for years and I replanted it in another location. It didn't skip a beat and is still standing.

Another shrub that I discovered in recent years is the Banana Shrub (*Michelia figo*). A grand Southern lady, banana shrub is a member of the magnolia family. Its lovely springtime flowers

resemble magnolia blooms but have a bold banana fragrance. The evergreen shrub's flush of flowers in spring is followed by sporadic flowering through summer. It tolerates pruning well and can be maintained at 4-5 feet tall. It reminds me of a camellia bush in appearance.

I have a mystery in my garden. I have researched it on the internet and I am still not sure of the answer. It involves my Tea Olives and their apparent lack of fragrance. Normally, Tea Olives are known to be some of the most sweetly fragrant plants in Southern gardens. People rave about the heavenly fragrance; however, I have never smelled mine. Could it be the variety, my nose or soil? According to my research, many people report that they have Tea Olives that have no fragrance. Mine are very healthy plants that bloom so I will appreciate them anyway. I'm still waiting.

One garden scent that wafts through the air from the wooded areas near my house is from nature's gift, Sweet Shrub. Gardeners know our native plant sweet shrub Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) by many names. Common names include sweet shrub, strawberry bush, Carolina allspice, sweet shade and bubbly blossom. Legend has it that in the days before regular baths and deodorants, women placed *Calycanthus floridus* blossoms in the bodice of their dresses, giving rise to the flowers' nickname of bubbly blossoms!

Some other garden scents that I enjoy in my garden that are worth mentioning include Star Gazer lilies, gardenias, hyacinths and Southern magnolia. Aromatic plants come in many sizes, shapes, and colors. If your garden needs a climbing bush consider Sweet Autumn clematis which can be invasive, Carolina Jasmine and climbing roses. Fragrant perennials include lily of the valley, hosta, carnation, peony, catmint lavender, and yarrow. Scent is so personal a preference that I suggest smelling a plant's foliage and blossoms before buying it. Not all scents appeal to all noses!

For more information on all of your horticulture questions, contact a Carroll County Master Gardener Volunteer at the UGA Extension Office at 900 Newnan Road, Carrollton. 770-836-8546 or via email at ccmg@uga.edu.

