

Ask a Master Gardener

November 17, 2015

Suzanne Holland, Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Florida Anise or Yellow Anise Tree

Q. Can you recommend a shrub or tree that stays green during the winter and flowers in the spring? I have magnolias, hollies, and camellias, but would like something a little different. Amanda R.

A. Some of my favorite shrubs are Florida Anise and Small Anise Tree which are in the Illicium family. I think it is just what you are looking for as they are underused native shrubs or small trees that do well in our area. These plants are native to the Southeast in zones 7 – 10. They prefer shade and moist soil, but can tolerate dryer and sunnier conditions if watered during prolonged dry spells. It naturally has a shrub-like form and can reach 10 to 12 feet in height. At first glance it is easy to see why Anise was considered to be in the Magnolia family, but this is no longer correct and it is now placed in its own genus - Illiciaceae. Florida Anise and Yellow Anise Tree leaves, flowers, and seeds are toxic, unlike the culinary Star-anise *Illicium verum* found in northeast Vietnam and southwest China.

If planted along a path or border and you brush against *Illicium* you will suddenly smell a pleasant anise-like fragrance. The genus name of this native plant comes from the Latin word meaning allurement in reference to the aromatic properties of the plant's leaves. The leaves are broad, leathery, smooth, and shiny. Although the main attraction is the fragrant evergreen foliage, the star-shaped flowers will appear in spring or early summer. Occasionally, you may get a nice autumn flush of flowers. Florida Anise, *Illicium floridanum*, has dark red star-shaped flowers and there is also a Florida Anise 'Alba' which has a white flower. As one might suspect, Yellow Anise Tree, *Illicium parviflorum*, has a pale-yellow bloom. The 2 inch diameter flowers are attractive, but they have a peculiar odor – like that of fish. Don't be put off by that warning as one needs to put her nose right next to the flower to catch the odor. So smell the leaves and not the flowers!

Illicium is easily propagated by seeds and cuttings. The shrubs form roots where lower branches touch the soil and these can be cut and dug for an easy way to obtain new plants. Florida Anise and Yellow Anise Tree are protected in Florida as a threatened species, so be sure to obtain your plants from a reputable dealer.

Anise is the perfect low maintenance evergreen shrub. You can trim into a formal hedge, use to naturalize, or plant in a rain garden. Being deer resistant and seldom bothered by insects or disease, it is perfect for you.

For more information or answers to any other gardening questions, contact a Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at ccmg@uga.edu, or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.