

## Chionanthus virginicus (American Fringetree)

*Chionanthus virginicus* is a small, deciduous, multi-stemmed, low-maintenance tree in the Oleaceae (olive) family native to the eastern U.S. In late spring, large, 4- to 8-in.-long loose clusters of lightly fragrant creamy white flowers with fringe-like petals cover the white fringetree for about two weeks just as the



Flower detail Erick Lux CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

leaves begin to emerge. These delicately fragrant paniculate flowers are produced on the previous year's growth.

Fringetrees are dioecious (separate male and female plants). They are rarely available *labeled* as male or female, so unless they are purchased in bloom or with fruit present, it is impossible to know which one you are getting. Although the male flowers are showier

Two species of fringetrees are available: the native white fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*, described here) and the Chinese fringetree (*Chionanthus retusus*.) Chinese fringetree is native to eastern Asia and shares many characteristics with *Chionanthus virginicus*. This is where Latin names become important -- to differentiate between native and non-native species in the same genus.

than female flowers due to longer petals, both male and female trees are striking in bloom.

Native white fringetrees remain small, maturing at

12- to 20 -ft. tall and wide. Fringetrees grow slowly, usually only 6- to 10-in. per year. In ideal conditions with rich, well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil, they may grow up to a foot per year. Due to a naturally

**Common name(s):** American Fringetree, Grancy Greybeard, Old Man's Beard, Sweetheart Tree, White Fringetree

strong branch structure, fringetrees rarely need pruning. If a single-stem tree form is preferred, pruning while young may be desirable.

The native *Chionanthus virginicus* grows best in full to part sun, with the best yellow fall foliage in partial shade and the best flowering in full sun. The ideal compromise would be sun through most of the day, but shade during hot afternoon hours.

Fringetrees do not transplant well, so choose an appropriate permanent location.



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Fringetrees are a nice specimen

plant in lawns, in a native garden, in small groups along a woodland border, or placed to take advantage of the sweet-fragranced blossoms.

Insect pests and diseases are rarely serious problems and are more likely to attack plants that are already stressed by drought, poor drainage, or wounds. Scale can be controlled with horticultural oil sprays. Mites are pests in full-sun locations. A borer is the most serious insect pest.

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For more information on gardening in Brunswick County, please call the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office, 910.253.2610.

### SOURCES:

[Chionanthus virginicus \(American Fringetree, American Fringe Tree, Fringetree, Fringe Tree, Grancy Greybeard, Old Man's Beard, Sweetheart Tree, White Fringetree\) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox \(ncsu.edu\)](#)

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/fringetree/>