

## Osmanthus fragrans (Fragrant Tea Olive)

Tea olives (*Osmanthus* species) are some of the most sweetly fragrant plants in Southern gardens. Fragrant Tea Olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*, described here) is the most fragrant species of a group known for their superb scent.



'Fudingzhu' is long flowering with exceptionally abundant, very fragrant creamy-white flowers. 'Fudingzhu' Flower close up Jim Robbins CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Fragrant Tea Olive has a long bloom period. Its small white flowers appear in leaf axils in the spring and sporadically in the fall. Its sweet, fruity scent is reminiscent of apricots, peaches, orange blossoms, or jasmine. Extracts from the flower are used in some of the most expensive perfumes.

Fragrant Tea Olive is a broadleaf evergreen with leathery, lustrous, dark green leaves and a dense habit. Plants are upright when young but can spread into a small, vase-shaped tree at maturity. Growth rate is moderate, approximately 4- to 12-in. per year, and strongly influenced by soil quality and organic matter content, available nutrients, and water availability.

This plant typically grows to a height of 10 to 20 feet. Plant it as a specimen for open or lawn areas, use it as a screen or hedge plant, or place it at the back of a perennial border. Placing it near pathways, patios, or entrances ensures you can enjoy the delightful fragrance.

Plant in full sun to partial shade and in moist soils with good drainage. In southern climates, afternoon

shade is a must. Once established, *Osmanthus fragrans* is drought-tolerant, but supply supplemental watering in hot, dry months. It rarely needs pruning (it usually forms a pleasing shape on its own), but it responds well to pruning for shape, to be pruned into a tree, or even espaliered.

It is hardy in USDA zones 8a to 11b. In a cooler cli-

Common names: Fragrant Tea Olive,  
Sweet Osmanthus, Tea Olive

mate, grow it in containers that are overwintered indoors or as a houseplant.

Fragrant Tea Olive is deer-resistant, drought-tolerant, and slightly salt-tolerant. Watch for aphids and scale. It is frost-sensitive, and injury will affect flowering.



Pruned into a tree form Jim Robbins CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

### SOURCES:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/osmanthus-fragrans/>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/tea-olive/>

By Kathryn Copley, Extension Master Gardener<sup>SM</sup> Volunteer, Brunswick County, NC

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