

DOWNNS PARK NATURE NOTES

SUMMER WHITES



Hundreds of shrubs all around the park are now putting on their summer whites, giving us a display of sweetly spiced flower spikes. All those blooms come from the sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*).



Also called summersweet, the eastern seaboard native produces seed capsules resembling peppercorns – but they're not edible. Even our many deer will pass up these shrubs. Bees and butterflies, however, find the flowers irresistible. If you want to take a sniff, make sure you won't disturb a bumblebee!

The flower spike looks like a bottlebrush, which may have suggested its use as a soap by early settlers.

The sweet pepperbush grows up to eight feet in the park, and every year produces leaves with prominent parallel veins and finely serrated edges. The foliage turns yellow in the fall [right], and the seed capsules stay on the plant until the next summer.

Sweet pepperbush is mostly free of pest and disease problems, and would make a handsome native addition to the home landscape.

– *Dave Cohn, naturalist volunteer*

