

Q: Can Winter honeysuckle be planted in Contra Costa?

A: *Lonicera fragrantissima* is one of the best plants for banishing the winter blues. Native to Eastern China, it was introduced to Europe in 1845, and arrived in the States soon thereafter. The common names of winter honeysuckle, sweet breath of spring and fragrant honeysuckle all refer to the wonderful perfume that fills the air around this plant in the winter months.

L. fragrantissima is not a fussy plant. It will tolerate both alkaline and acidic soils; garden watering and drought, and is relatively pest and disease resistant. It will grow in sun to part shade, forming an arching 8' shrub with rounded, blue-green leaves. In cold climates it may drop its leaves in the winter months, but this rarely happens here. The flowers are small, clear white with yellow stamens and are produced on older wood. They are not dramatic to look at, but their fragrance makes up for their lack of show. Bloom begins in January and may continue for several months. Dark red berries may follow the flowers in late spring.

If you need to prune the plant it should be done shortly after the blooming has finished. . This plant will tolerate significant pruning, bouncing back rapidly. The biggest problem you may have is locating a plant. The shrub is unremarkable during the usual planting months, and there has not been a lot of demand for it from the public. If you can find a shrub, it is relatively easy to propagate from cuttings and divisions.

Lonicera fragrantissima

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Lonicera fragrantissima is no newcomer to Texas gardens. It can be found growing unattended in old cemeteries and homesites where few other ornamental plants survive. The two most-often used common names are winter honeysuckle and standing honeysuckle, both of which provide useful insight into the landscape character of the plant. Robert Fortune, the great plant explorer from Scotland, found *L. fragrantissima* in China and introduced it to Europe in 1845. Soon thereafter, it appeared in American gardens.

The flowers are small and creamy white. They appear during midwinter and, although not outstanding in appearance, are highly fragrant. Foliage is rounded and bluish-green in color. In all but far South Texas, *L. fragrantissima* is deciduous, and the flowers occur on bare branches. It is unusually well-adapted, and can be found in far North as well as South Texas. Any good garden soil is sufficient, with quality specimens being found in either moderately alkaline or acid soils.

Maximum height is about 8 feet with an arching form to the branches. Red fruit in spring will often follow the winter flowers. Landscape uses include specimens, background plantings, or hedges. Winter honeysuckle is very cold- and drought-tolerant. Propagation is from seed, cutting, or division of older clumps.

Availability on a national scale is fairly good. *L. fragrantissima* is often sold as a packaged deciduous shrub during winter. Although not a spectacular plant, the form is nice. Its winter flowers and fragrance are welcome, and its hardy character is a real asset. Early Texans often

placed a specimen of winter honeysuckle near a frequently-used gate to the garden so that the fragrance and flowers could be easily enjoyed. Stems are also nice to cut and bring into the home where partially-open buds continue to open. Like many of the plants popular in the last century, *L. fragrantissima* is enjoying a renewal of popularity. Few plants will thrive in Texas gardens with less attention.

Lonicera fragrantissima — Winter Honeysuckle

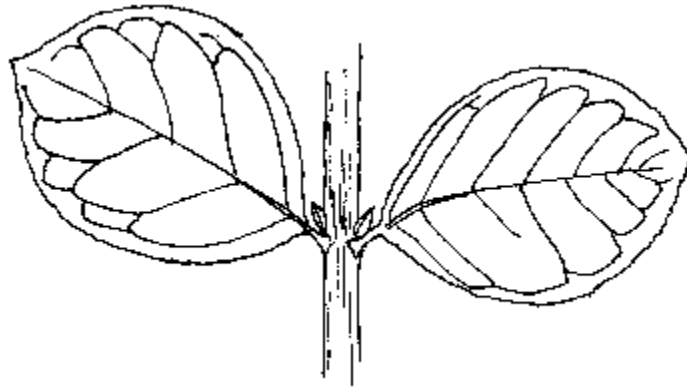
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FAMILY: Caprifoliaceae

LEAVES: Opposite, simple, elliptic to broad-ovate, 1 to 3" long, two-third's to almost as wide, acute, broad cuneate at base, setose-ciliate, dull blue-green to dark green and glabrous above, setose on the midrib; petiole—1/3" long.

BUDS: Imbricate, sessile, with numerous 4-ranked scales, slightly pubescent.

STEM: Slender, glabrous, light, often lustrous brown; pith—white, solid or slightly excavated.



SIZE: 6 to 10'(15') high by 6 to 10'(15') in spread.

HABIT: Wide-spreading, irregularly rounded, deciduous shrub with tangled mass of slender recurving branches; holds foliage very late in fall and in southern states into winter.

LEAF COLOR: Dull dark bluish green in summer; foliage holds late and falls green or brown; leaves out early in spring.

FLOWERS: Creamy white, tinged pink or red, 2-lipped, lemon-scented and extremely fragrant, relatively small, 1/2" long, March–early April (Urbana, IL) for a 3 to 4 week period; opens in January, peaks in February, still flowering in mid-March (Athens), borne in axillary peduncled pairs before the leaves; not very showy but certainly among the most fragrant of woody flowering shrubs, the sweet lemon fragrance is about the first of all woody shrubs, tremendous plant for pulling one out of the winter doldrums.

FRUIT: Berry, two-ovaries fuse, 1/4 to 1/3" diameter, dark red, late May–early June, seldom seen for it is borne under foliage.

NOTES:

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Lonicera fragrantissima

COMMON NAME

Fragrant Honeysuckle

PLANT FAMILY

Caprifoliaceae

SIZE GROUP

5

PLANT TYPE

semi-evergreen shrub

GROWTH HABIT, RATE:

Spreading, irregular-rounded, to 8 feet, fast growing.

ADAPTABILITY:

Adaptable to many soils and pH. Full sun, does not do well in wet soils. Drought tolerant compared to other *Lonicera* species.

FUNCTIONS:

Hedge or screen, shrub border. Nice where fragrant flowers are close at hand.

PROBLEMS AND MAINTENANCE:

Can be renewed by cutting plant to base. Does not get "brooming" caused by aphids.

NATIVE RANGE:

China

USEFUL RANGE (USDA Zones):

Zones 5b-9a

SUBSPECIES, VARIETIES, CULTIVARS:

Lonicera fragrantissima Caprifoliaceae

Winter Honeysuckle lon-ISS-er-a fra-gran-TIS-i-ma

- Deciduous, or partly evergreen, shrub, 6-10(15) ft [1.8-3(4.5) m] high, equal spread, irregularly rounded, tangled mass of recurving branches. Leaves opposite, simple, elliptic to broad-ovate, 2.5-7.5 cm, dull blue-green to dark green, midrib covered with bristles. Flowers creamy white, not showy, lemon-scented and extremely fragrant. In mild climates, it may bloom from December into March. Fruit a red berry, 6 mm diam., in late spring.
- Sun to partial shade. Prefers good loamy soil, moist, well-drained soil, avoid wet situations.
- Hardy to USDA Zone 4 Native to eastern China.
- *Lonicera*: after Adam Lonitzer (1528-86), German naturalist and herbalist.
- *fragrantissima*: very fragrant.
- Oregon State Univ. campus: east side (north end) of Weniger Hall.