



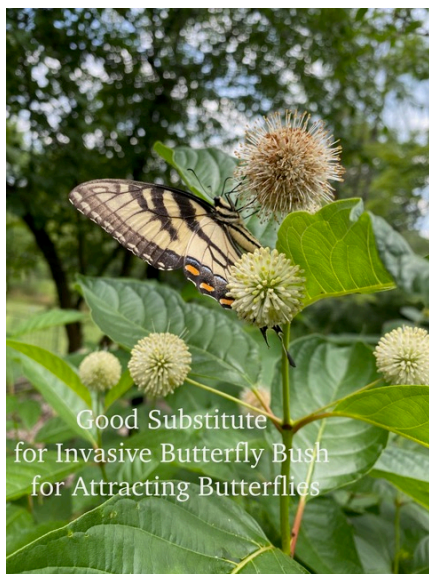
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension
of Hunterdon County
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Buttonbush

by Kathy T.

Rutgers Master Gardener of Hunterdon County

Walking through my July garden, this Master Gardener was amazed at the activity surrounding the blooming buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*). The bumble bees industriously buzzed from one flowerhead to another, and native bees and butterflies hovered as well. It occurred to me that I had never noticed a buttonbush in anyone else's garden, so more people could be introduced to this plant.



Buttonbush is native from New Brunswick to the upper Mississippi River Valley south to Florida and Texas. It typically grows along streams or wetlands and can tolerate occasional standing water, so it is excellent for rain gardens or wetland erosion control. It is tolerant of many soil types, likes full sun to part shade, and is hardy in horticultural zones 5-11 with few pests or diseases. It usually grows 6-12 feet tall and can form thickets. My Hunterdon County garden is in a dry area, and although not ideal, for two years, the bush has adapted well to these conditions. The buttonbush in my yard has survived several years of on-and-off drought conditions.

The plant itself can get rangy, but tolerates pruning and can be cut back every couple of years if necessary. The leaves are beautiful, glossy green, and serve as larval host for several species of sphinx moth. The globe-like flowerhead is composed of tiny tubular flowers only about 1/3" wide. Each flower grows a long, protruding style supporting the flower's pistal at the end, which

makes the flowerhead look like it's studded with pins. The flowers bloom for a month or more, gradually turn reddish to brownish, and develop seeds (nutlets) that persist into winter, serving as food for waterfowl. One caution is that the foliage is poisonous to livestock, so buttonbush should not be planted on grazing land. The shrub is classified as moderately deer resistant.



An interesting side note is that another name for buttonbush is honey-bells for its use as a major nectar plant for honey bees. In days past, one region of the lower Mississippi flood plain developed a thriving honey industry based on the buttonbush. Today, the Xerces Society rates it of "Special Value" to honey bees, bumble bees, and native bees.

For more about use with bees:

<https://www.beeculture.com/button-bush/>

<http://www.xerces.org/blog/planting-for-pollinators-button-bush>

For more about growing as a garden plant:

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/common-buttonbush/>

<https://extension.psu.edu/buttonbush-the-native-moisture-loving-shrub>

