

Franklinia

Franklinia alatamaha

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Summary:

Foliage: About 5 inches long; narrow elliptic; deciduous

Height: About 15 feet

Spread: About 10 feet

Shape: Upright oval to round

Main features: Franklinia is a very attractive large shrub to small tree with lustrous leaves, showy 3 inch diameter white flowers in August/September, smooth bark, and usually brilliant red-orange fall foliage color. In addition to its aesthetics, Franklinia's interesting history adds to its charm. This species was once native to the area surrounding the Altamaha River in Georgia. John and William Bartram (father and son, respectively) found and admired this plant growing in southeast Georgia along the Altamaha River in 1765. William returned to the area in 1776 and collected Franklinia seed. Since the first decade in the 19th century, no one has ever found this species growing in the wild and all Franklinia plants that we enjoy in our gardens are putatively derived from William Bartram's seed collection. There is speculation that a cotton disease, a crop widely grown in Georgia, was responsible for the extirpation of the species. Franklinia has a well-deserved reputation for being temperamental; it has a relatively low transplant success rate due to its exacting cultural requirements. This species requires a well-drained, moist, acid soil that has ample organic matter. Apparently there is a fungal disease (*Phytophthora cinnamoni*) that plagues this species; this disease is also prevalent in, and perhaps originates in, nursery growing areas. Despite the exacting cultural requirements and relatively low transplant success rate, Franklinia is a wonderful addition to a garden. It is worthy of specimen plant status.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 5 to 8

Light: Full sun to part shade

Moisture: Moist

Soil type: Well-drained soil with ample organic matter

pH: Acid

Functions:

Franklinia is certainly worthy of serving as a specimen plant or any where a small deciduous tree is appropriate.

Care:

In addition to the required site conditions, this species will need irrigation during droughts.

Additional Information:

'Wintonbury' is a clone from one of the largest plants growing in Connecticut. This cultivar is marketed as having an "improved cold hardiness and disease resistance" (Broken Arrow Nursery, Hamden, CT).