

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

MARCH 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

Photos by Will Stuart and Lisa Tompkins



Lindera benzoin Spicebush

Install a butterfly factory in your yard

It seems so simple, and Gil Nelson author of *Best Native Plants for Southern Gardens*, puts it plainly, “Spicebush is a must-have shrub for butterfly enthusiasts who want to attract spicebush swallowtails to their gardens.” The distinctive caterpillars, with the large fake eyes at the head often intimidate predators.

Spicebush benefits go far beyond providing food for swallowtail butterfly larva (aka caterpillars). The red fall berries are thought to be so tasty to birds, they don't last long upon ripening. These berries are eaten by at least 24 species of birds including thrushes,

catbirds, red-eyed vireo and eastern kingbirds.

Where are my berries?

Just like the Hollies, Spicebush is dioecious, meaning separate plants have the male and female flowers. It is a good idea to have several Spicebush plants in your garden to insure pollination and fruit set. These small oval shaped red berries stand out against the golden glow of the leaves in fall.

Landscape Uses

Spicebush is one of those plants that announces Spring. Typically blooming in early March, the tiny blooms clinging tightly along the stems in small bunches are delightful. The delicate light yellow blossoms pull you into the garden for a closer visit and will reward you with their

spicy scent—much more subtle than a bright yellow Forsythia.

As an understory plant, Spicebush is commonly found in wet or soggy, partly shady areas throughout the Southeast. However, it can adapt to drier locations with more shade.

The shape of a Spicebush shrub is open and upwardly spreading, reaching 12 to 15 feet tall. It works well in a mixed border, naturalized informally in the woodland garden or as a specimen plant. It is an easy plant to find and also easy to grow.

Scratch the stems or crush the leaves to release the spicy smell. And, like many native shrubs, there is a history of tea made from the buds, leaves and flowers, and the dried seeds have been used like allspice. It may be this scent that deer find unpalatable about Spicebush. Always a bonus.

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