

Buttonbush

(*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Buttonbush is a large, long-lived shrub that occurs naturally in wetlands and along stream and river edges. The flowers attract many bees, butterflies and moths. Its seeds are eaten by ducks and other birds, and the foliage is browsed by deer.

The plant produces many globular white flowers with protruding pistils that give them a pincushion-like appearance. The fragrant flowers are about 2 inches in diameter.

Buttonbush's leaves are dark green, elliptic to ovate, and shiny on top, with pale undersides. They are up to 7 inches long and arranged in opposite pairs or in whorls. The plant is deciduous, losing its leaves in the winter with new ones emerging in early spring. Seeds are born in the fall in hard, reddish-brown ball-like achenes.

The genus *Cephalanthus* is from the Greek words *kephale*, or "head," and *ánthos*, or "flower." The species epithet *occidentalis* is Latin for "west" or "western," suggesting the plant is native to the western hemisphere.

Family: Rubiaceae (Coffee, bedstraw or madder family)

Native range: Nearly throughout

To see where natural populations of Buttonbush have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–11

Soil: Wet sandy, clay, loamy or mucky soils

Exposure: Full sun to shade

Growth habit: 5–20' tall

Propagation: Seed, cuttings

Garden tips: Because Buttonbush requires wet soil and its roots can withstand full submersion, it makes a great addition to pond and lake edges and wetland depressions. In shade, the foliage will be more open. Plants can be pruned to encourage denser foliage. Seeds can be gathered in late summer or early fall before the flowerheads dry out and will germinate without any treatment.

Caution: The foliage is toxic to both humans and livestock.

Buttonbush is often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery on your area.



Photo by Stacey Matrazzo