



Common Name: PONDSPICE

Scientific Name: *Litsea aestivalis* (Linnaeus) Fernald

Other Commonly Used Names: none

Previously Used Scientific Names: *Laurus aestivalis* Linnaeus, *Litsea geniculata* (Walter) G. Nicholson, *Glabraria geniculata* (Walter) Britton, *Malapoenna geniculata* (Walter) J.M. Coulter

Family: Lauraceae (laurel)

Rarity Ranks: G3/S2

State Legal Status: Rare

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: OBL

Description: Shrub or small tree to 10 feet (3 meters) tall. **Twigs** zigzag and odorless when crushed. **Leaves** ½ - 1½ inches (1.5 - 4 cm) long, deciduous, simple, alternate, somewhat leathery, smooth, oblong to lance-shaped, margins entire and slightly thickened. **Flowers** about ¼ inch (0.6 cm) wide, opening before leaves appear, with 6 yellow **sepals** and no petals, usually in clusters at the tips of twigs. **Female and male flowers** on separate plants; **female flowers** with 1 ovary, 9 non-functional stamens, and a ring of nectar-producing glands; **male flowers** with 9 stamens, each with 4 openings on the anther. **Fruit** about ¾ inch (0.4 - 1 cm) long, fleshy, red, round.

Similar Species: Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) also flowers before leafing out; its flowers resemble pondspice but its twigs have a spicy smell and are not zigzag. Myrtle-leaf holly grows in similar habitats, and its leaves are similar in size and shape to those of pondspice but are shiny, evergreen, and tipped by a tiny bristle; its flowers are white and its twigs are not zigzag.

Related Rare Species: See pondberry (*Lindera melissifolia*) and bog spicebush (*Lindera subcoriacea*) on this website.

Habitat: Edges of swamps, cypress ponds, sandhill depression ponds, and Carolina bays, sometimes forming thickets around pond margins.

Life History: Pondspice reproduces sexually as well as vegetatively by suckering from underground stems (rhizomes), sometimes forming thickets. It is dioecious – female and male flowers are on separate plants. The flowers are probably pollinated by flies and small bees which are attracted to the nectar produced in glands at the base of the female flowers. The fruits are dispersed by birds and other animals who eat the fruit. Pondspice is currently at risk of infection by laurel wilt disease, a fungal (*Raffaelea* sp.) infection that kills trees and shrubs in the laurel family. The fungus is carried by an exotic insect, the red bay ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus*), and blocks water-conducting cells of infected plants, resulting in wilted leaves and, quickly and ultimately, death. Laurel wilt has spread quickly along the southeastern coast and caused extensive mortality among red bay (*Persea* spp.). Laurel wilt is likely to spread inland, infecting and killing rare species in the laurel family such as pondspice and pondberry (*Lindera melissifolia*) as well as common species such as sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) and spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*).

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (early March–April) and fruiting (May–June).

Range: Coastal Plain of Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

Threats: Ditching, draining, and filling wetlands. Fire suppression and construction of firebreaks in wetland transition zones.

Georgia Conservation Status: More than 50 populations are known, although few regularly produce fruit. More than half of the populations are on 2 military bases; only one population occurs on conservation land.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Protect isolated wetlands from draining. Avoid placing roads and firebreaks in transition zones between swamps or ponds and uplands. Allow prescribed fires in uplands to burn into wetlands (pondspice re-sprouts vigorously after a fire).

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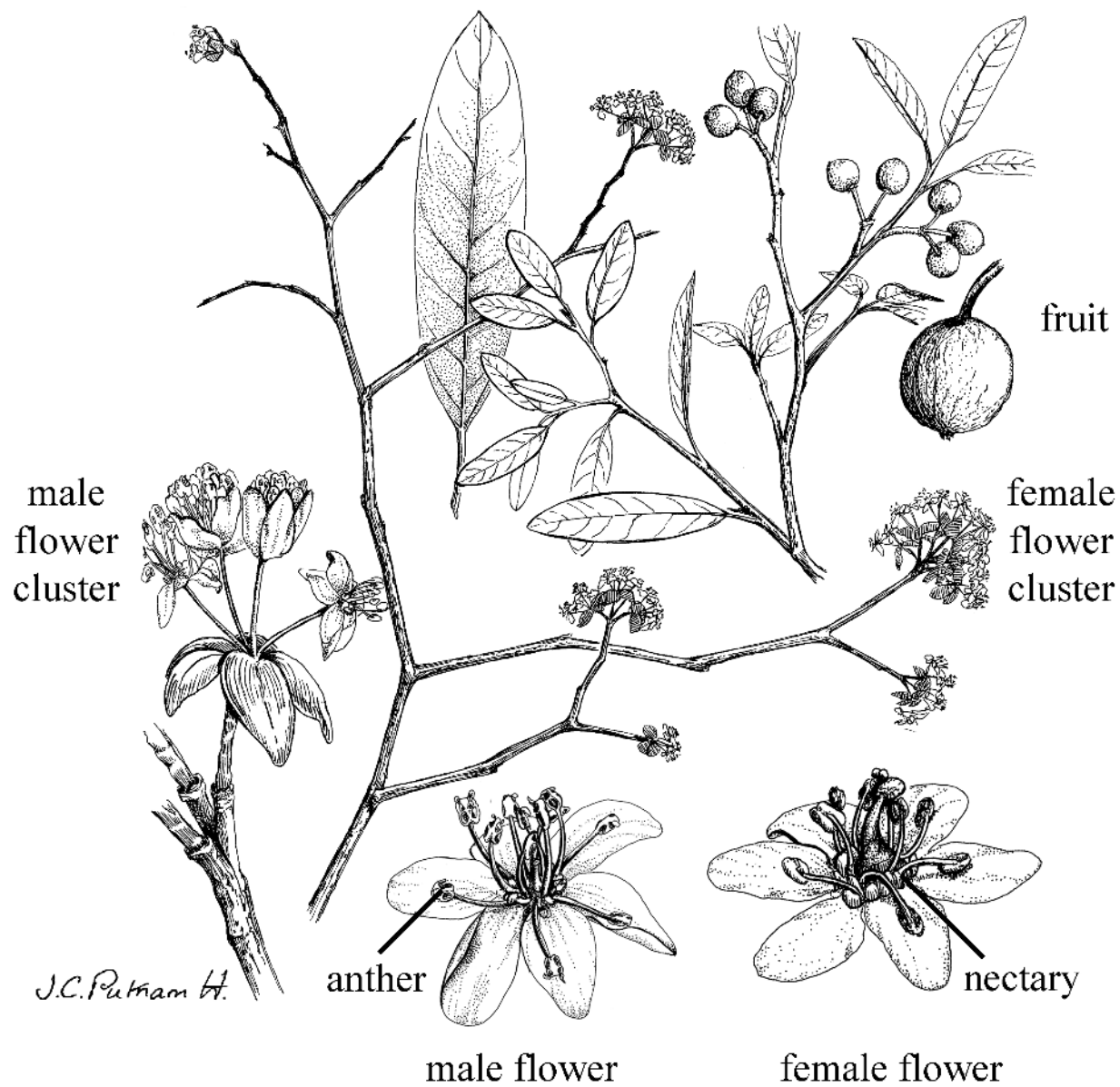
Author of Species Account: Linda G. Chafin

Date Compiled or Updated:

L. Chafin, May 2007: original account

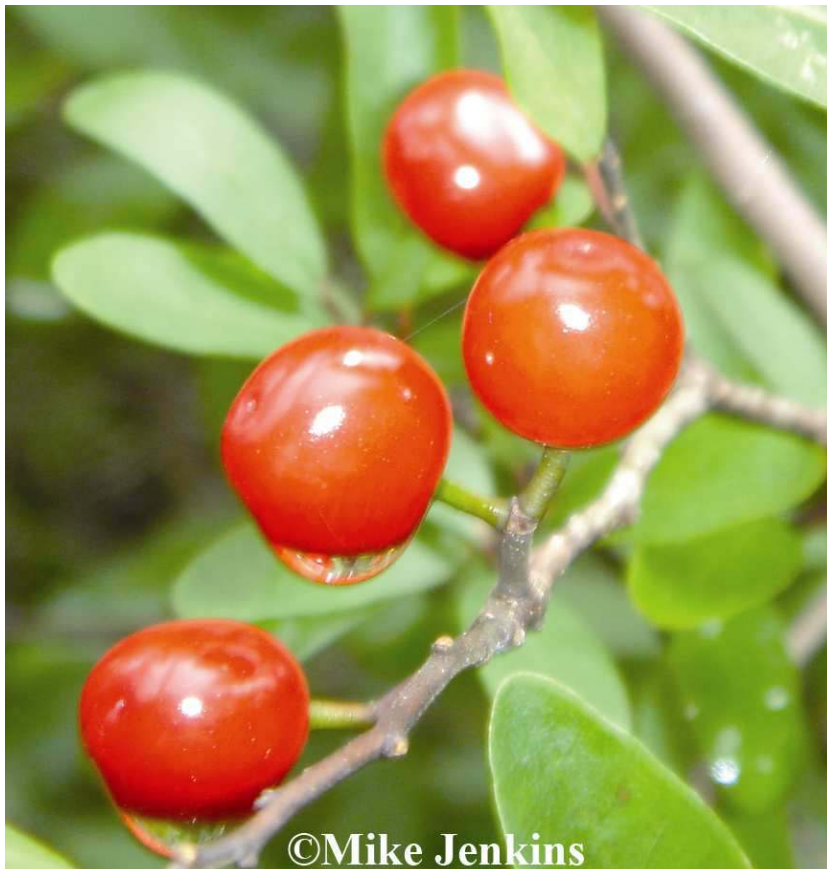
K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures

PONDSPICE
Litsea aestivalis





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Inflorescence



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