Common Name: PONDBERRY

Scientific Name: *Lindera melissifolia* (Walter) Blume

Other Commonly Used Names: pond spicebush, jove's fruit

Previously Used Scientific Names: *Benzoin melissifolium* (Walter) Nees von Esenbeck

Family: Lauraceae (laurel)

Rarity Ranks: G2/S1

State Legal Status: Endangered

Federal Legal Status: Endangered

Federal Wetland Status: OBL

Description: Shrub up to 6 feet (2 meters) tall, forming dense colonies of green or brown stems with yellowish bases. **Leaves** 2 - 6 inches (5 - 16 cm) long, drooping, deciduous, alternate, widest at or below the middle, with a rounded base and sharply pointed tip; both surfaces of the leaf with conspicuous netted veins and short, soft hairs; leaves smell spicy (like sassafras) when crushed. **Male and female flowers** on separate plants, appearing before leaves, borne in clusters

of 2 - 6 flowers, each with 6 pale yellow, petal-like **tepals**. **Fruit** about ½ inch (1 - 1.2 cm) long, bright red, oval to round, on a stout stalk about ½ inch (0.9 - 1.2 cm) long with a blunt tip. The stalk persists through the winter following fruiting.

Similar Species: Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a large shrub up to 15 feet tall (5 meters). Its leaves do not droop and are usually widest above the middle, tapering to a wedge-shaped base; upper surface of the leaves are smooth and dark green, lower surface paler and hairy with inconspicuous veins; crushed leaves and twigs smell spicy or medicinal. It is common in moist woods and floodplains in north and central Georgia.

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

Habitat: Edges of sandhill ponds and limesinks, often occurring with pondspice (*Litsea aestivalis*), also rare (see account on this website).

Life History: Pondberry reproduces sexually and, primarily, vegetatively by the spread of stolons (horizontal, ground-level stems that root at the nodes and tips). Pondberry is dioecious, with female and male flowers on separate plants, and often forms extensive colonies of all-female or all-male plants. Female clones are usually smaller than the male clones and are often absent. Even though female pondberry plants frequently set abundant fruit, seedlings are rarely seen. Pondberry is a host plant for spicebush swallowtail (*Papilia troilus*), which lays its eggs singly on the lower surface of the leaves; when the eggs hatch, the larval stages (caterpillars) eat the leaves of the pondberry.

Pondberry 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 pondberry and pondspice, and common species, such as sassafras.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (late February–mid-March) and fruiting (August–October). Plants may be identified in the winter from colonial growth form, aromatic twigs, and presence of last season's fruit stalks.

Range: Coastal Plain of Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Missouri, and Arkansas. The species has not been seen in Louisiana and Florida in more than a century.

Threats: Ditching, draining, and filling wetlands. Fire suppression. Digging by feral hogs. Infection by laurel wilt disease.

Georgia Conservation Status: Ten populations are extant, only 2 are protected on conservation land. Most of Georgia's colonies have only male plants.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Allow prescribed fires in uplands to burn into the edges of ponds. Avoid ditching, draining, clearing, and logging in isolated wetlands. Eradicate wild hogs.

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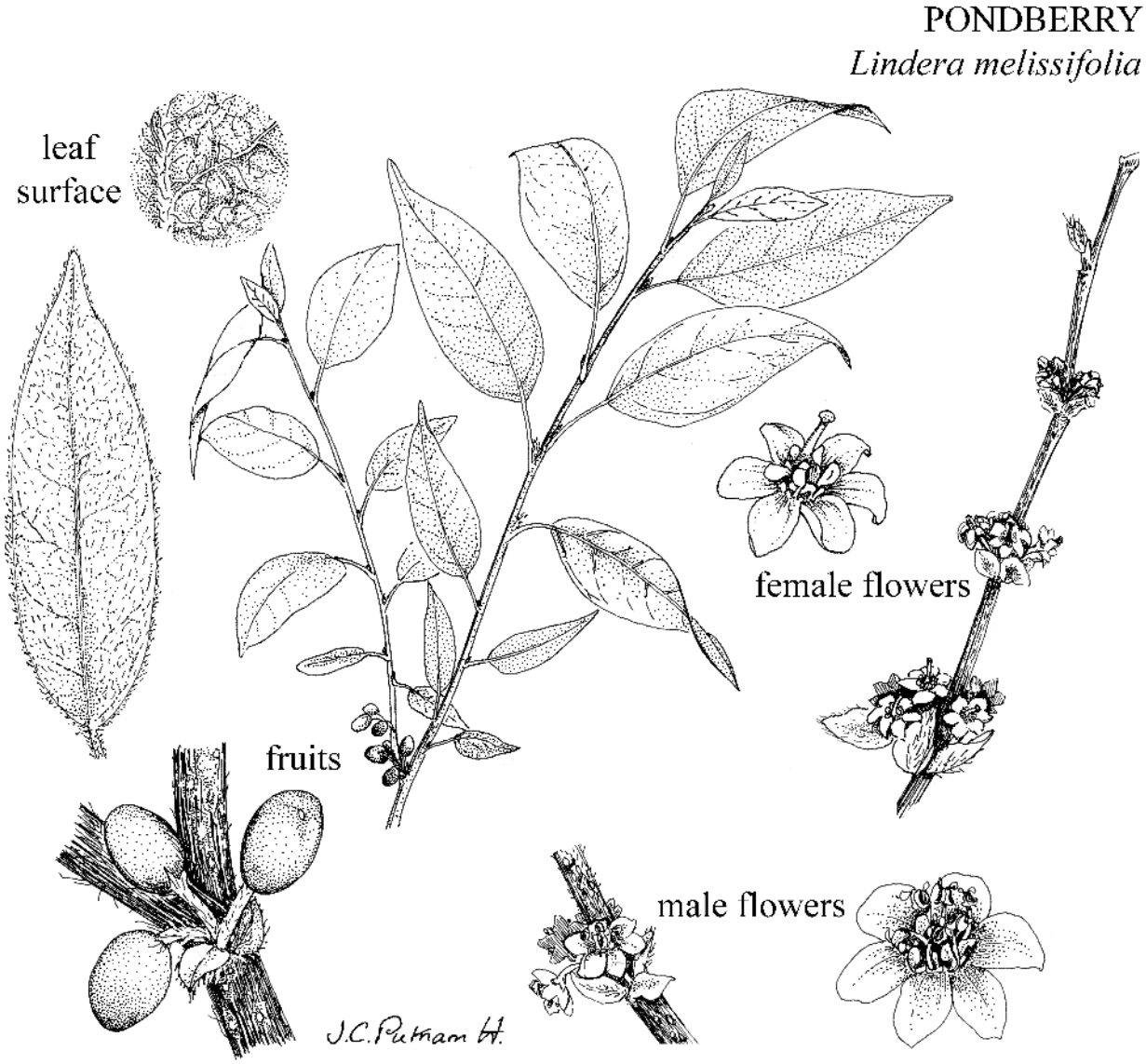
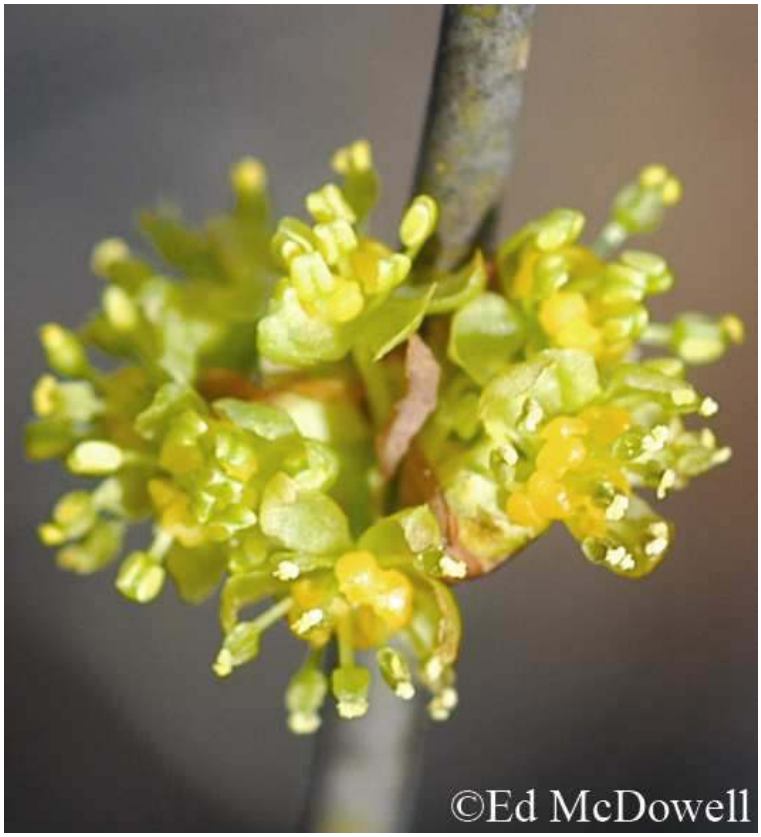
L. Chafin, May 2007: original account
K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures





Male flowers