

Small tree or large shrub suitable for sun or shade: Carolina Buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana*, formerly *Rhamnus caroliniana*)

Description: Carolina Buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana*, formerly known as *Rhamnus caroliniana*) is one of about 100 different Buckthorn species found in both tropical and temperate locales in both hemispheres. The United States is home to 9 Buckthorn species, of which 4 are found in Texas. Carolina Buckthorn is an attractive small tree or large shrub that is adaptable to many growing situations. In East Texas where rain is plentiful, it is frequently an understory tree/shrub growing in bottomland conditions, while on the Edwards plateau, it can be found growing in small groves in limestone soil in full sun with much less rainfall.

Flowers: Carolina Buckthorn has small, compact clusters of tiny yellow-green flowers in May to early June that attract many winged pollinators.

Planting sites: Carolina Buckthorn needs a “small-tree” space allotment. It is shade-tolerant and can be added as an understory tree which survives beautifully with three or four hours of sun a day. But, it also tolerates full sun. While Carolina Buckthorn’s growth is influenced by its growing conditions, in the Denton area it can be expected to reach about 20 feet tall and 8-12 feet wide.

Watering Instructions: Carolina Buckthorn should be watered after planting and again every other week during its first growing season. After the first growing season, it should survive with existing rainfall because of its drought tolerance, but may be watered during prolonged drought.

Comments: Carolina Buckthorn has colorful autumn foliage and beautiful autumn fruit. The leaves are 3-4 inches long, prominently veined, shiny, oval, deciduous and are attractive from spring through late fall. Once they begin changing colors in the fall, the show is on-going until every leaf falls. From glossy dark green, the leaves take on varying colors from yellow-gold to a combination of bronze-sienna, some hanging on through February. Meanwhile, the fruit cluster is also vying for attention. Red, quarter-inch diameter fruit turn blue-black with maturity and provide an October-December buffet for mockingbirds, catbirds, brown thrashers, and various other birds. The fruit clusters are so pretty that they could be used as part of Thanksgiving or Christmas bouquets.

Look for the NICE! Plant of the Season signs and information sheets on your next visit to a participating North Texas nursery. Thank you for using native plants in your landscapes.

Trinity Forks Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas meetings are the 4th Thursday in Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Sep & Oct, TWU’s ACT building 6:30 pm, 2nd floor.



Photo: Dorothy Thetford