

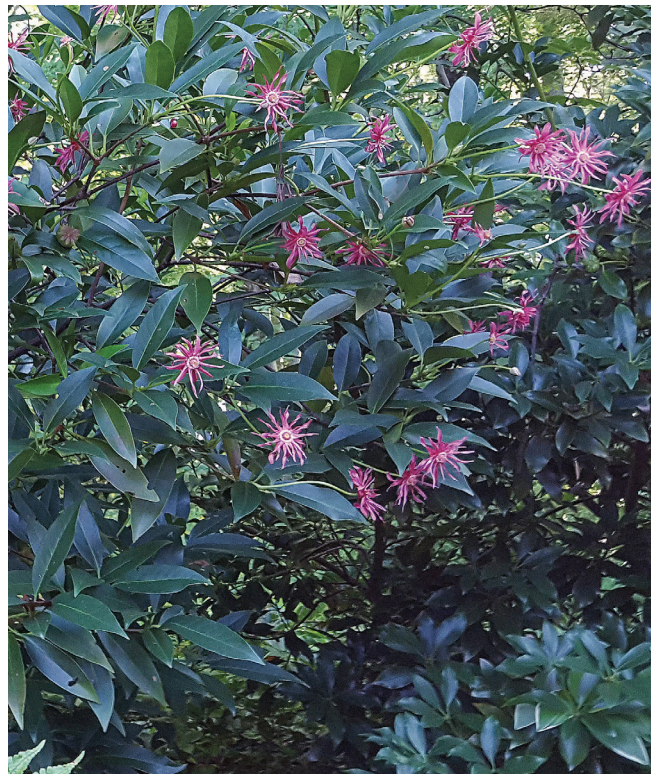
STAR ANISE (*Illicium*)

Cat Mebolic and Melinda Zoebler

This year we have selected the genus *Illicium* as our featured woody plant. *Illicium* is an uncommon garden plant with fantastic attributes. The genus *Illicium* has traditionally been the sole member of the Illiciaceae, but more modern sources recognize it as being in the Schisandraceae (the starvine family). Those of us that enjoy the spice and earthiness of “star anise” have appreciated the attributes of *Illicium verum*, a species native to southwest China. The genus *Illicium* has approximately 30 species, but only two are native to the United States, *I. floridanum* and *I. parviflorum*. In cultivation these two species have been joined by *I. anisatum*, *I. henryi*, *I. lanceolatum*, *I. parviflorum*, and some have also been bred with *I. mexicanum* to create a range of interesting evergreen shrubs for the garden. Over the last two years UDBG staff has been acquiring both the straight species and unusual cultivars to add to the sale.

All the *Illicium* offered for sale are broadleaved evergreen plants and most have lustrous thick leaves. The genus name *Illicium* comes from the Latin name *illicio* meaning allure, referring to the aromatic scent or spice released by bruised or crushed leaves. *Illicium* is resistant to most pests and diseases and does well in shade locations. Plants contain the chemical Safrol which gives it its characteristic smell and makes it highly undesirable to deer and insect predation. *Illicium* is becoming more common in southern gardens in the United States and is not commonly utilized in the mid-Atlantic region though it should be because of its evergreen nature and shade tolerance.

The native *Illicium floridanum* (Florida Anise-tree) is one of the more available *Illicium* in the trade, and its characteristics are what many think of when discussing the genus *Illicium*. Its evergreen leaves are dark green on the top and a paler green below. The leaves are shaped like an ellipse or lance-head and are up to 6" long by 3" wide. The leaf margin is smooth, giving the leaves a very clean look. The leaves are clustered at the tips of the branches, giving the appearance of being whorled. The leaf petiole is bright red, adding a subtle touch of color to the winter landscape. The whole plant—twigs, leaves, and flowers—is noted for its aromatic fragrance. The Florida Anise-tree is actually a shrub that is upright and very full even in shade, another desirable characteristic for gardeners. It flowers even in the densest of shade, and in its native southern habitat, can be found growing in seepy, primordial environments. Plants can be 6-10' high with the same spread. The flowering period is April to May, but occasional flowers have been observed into September at UDBG.



Illicium 'Woodlanders Ruby' in Claudia Bradley's garden
Photo: Claudia Bradley

Plants contain the chemical Safrol which gives it its characteristic smell and makes it highly undesirable to deer and insect predation.

We are lucky to be able to offer *Illicium floridanum* var. *album* in the sale this year. The flowers on this variety are white, but the variety *album* has the same large flower size as *I. floridanum*. The leaves of the variety are slightly lighter in color than the species and the plants are often smaller in habit. Both the species and variety are hardy in zones 6 to 9.

The *Illicium anisatum* (Anise-tree) has flowers that are creamy white (sometimes greenish-yellow) and are only 1" across. The flowers have up to 30 individual petals, but unlike other species the flowers are not fragrant. The flowering period is earlier than other species, occurring from March to April. *I. anisatum* has a more formal look with lustrous dark green foliage.

Another species of *Illicium* uncommonly seen in northern gardens is *Illicium henryi* (Henry's Anise-tree). Like most *Illicium*, this deer resistant plant can also tolerate both drought and wet conditions. The flowers are unique in color, ranging from a pale pink, to coral, or even red. Like most members of the genus, the flowers are on the large evergreen side, barely reaching 1 inch across. The plants can be up to 12' tall and equally wide, making it a small evergreen tree or shrub



Illicium anisatum
Photo: John Frett



Illicium anisatum
'Murasaki-no-sato' foliage
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Illicium anisatum 'Murasaki-no-sato' flowers
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

that blends well into the landscaped garden. However, when grown in full sun, plants are much more compact. Hardy to zone 7 and protect from winter winds.

Illicium lanceolatum (Guangdong Star Anise) has the narrowest leaf of any we offer. The foliage can be up to 6" long but is only 1.5" wide; very aromatic when crushed. The new leaves emerge a bright red and mature to a dark green. The leaves are often clustered at the branch tips of this species giving it a whorled appearance like *I. floridanum*. The Guangdong Star Anise has a small pink flower and has been observed to flower in two-week periods between May and June, with sparse flowering occurring up to a month after.

Illicium mexicanum (Mexican Anise-tree) is an ornamental species that is found in gardens as both hybrid and as straight species. Like *I. floridanum*, the flowers of *I. mexicanum* are large and red-maroon. These flowers appear in spring and continue into summer. *I. mexicanum* is the longest flowering of any of the species. To grow this species successfully in the Delaware Valley, *I. mexicanum* needs to be placed in rich garden soil with good drainage and in a sheltered site.

Another species offered for sale, *I. parviflorum*, the Ocala Anise-tree or Yellow Anise-tree, is also an upright shrub but with a more pyramidal habit. A rare Florida endemic, *I. parviflorum*

is unique in that it can be clonal or suckering, which creates some unique opportunities for its use in the landscape. The leaves are 2-4" long and up to 2" wide with a blunt or rounded tip. The leaves are more of an olive-green on both surfaces, giving the gardener a new evergreen color to experiment with in the winter landscape. Flowers are inconspicuous, but the observant collector may appreciate its small yellow flowers.

We are excited to offer additional *Illicium* cultivars outside of what is outlined in this summary. Some unique cultivars provide characteristics that enhance the garden of both the excited neophyte and the discerning collector. All these *Illicium* do best in partial shade in moist well-drained organic soil. Many of them can tolerate drought conditions, and *I. henryi* and *I. parviflorum* are even known to tolerate extremely wet soils.

We hope that you will be as enchanted by this genus as we have been while preparing for the sale.



Illicium parviflorum 'Florida Sunshine'
Photo: Anna Bower



Illicium floridanum 'Pink Frost' foliage
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Illicium floridanum 'Thayer'
Photo: John Frett



Illicium lanceolatum shrub
Photo: Bruce Crawford



Close up of *Illicium lanceolatum* leaves
Photo: Jason Veil



Illicium mexicanum 'Aztec Fire'
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Illicium henryi foliage
Photo: Jason Veil

Latin Name	Common Name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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<i>Illicium</i> 'Woodland Ruby'	Woodland Ruby Anise	5-6	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$45
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A hybrid between *Illicium floridanum* 'Alba' and *Illicium mexicanum*. In spring and fall, ruby-pink, starfish-like flowers appear, larger than on either parent. A vigorous hybrid that spreads 4-5 feet and with lustrous, dark evergreen foliage. Hardy Zone 7.

<i>Illicium anisatum</i>	Anise-tree	6-10	☉	☁	3 g, 1-3	\$65
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Native to S. China, Japan and Taiwan growing in scrub and forest at low altitudes, and often planted near Buddhist shrines and temples. A dense-growing, broadleaf evergreen tall shrub or small tree that tolerates wet sites, heavy shade, erosion, and deer don't bother—what's not to like! In spring, star-shaped, creamy-green flowers with narrow petals appear. Plant in protected site unless in Zone 7.

<i>Illicium anisatum</i> 'Murasaki-no-sato'	Purple Glaze™ Anise-tree	4-6	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$65
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In early spring white to pale yellow ¾" flowers carried in clusters of 3-7, followed by starry fruits that smell of cinnamon but are not the ones used in cooking. The wood is used for incense in temples and shrines in China and Japan. This cultivar has new growth that emerges a glossy, sumptuous dark burgundy, then slowly fades to dark, forest green.

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Grey Ghost'	Florida Star Anise	6-8	☉	☁	3 g, 2	\$45
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A vigorous selection of our southern native shrub with unusual pewter-colored foliage with a fine white margin on each leaf provides the perfect backdrop to the pale pink flowers in spring. N

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Pebblebrook'	Florida Anise-tree	6-8	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$45
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A denser selection with profuse, 2" starfish-like maroon flowers appearing early spring. Evergreen shrub that grows well in filtered sun with adequate soil moisture. Hardy Zone 5. N

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Pink Flowered'	Florida Anise-tree	8-10	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$45
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Two-inch starfish-like pale pink flowers in spring displayed against aromatic leaves on evergreen shrub. Prefers moist soil. 4-6' spread. N

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Pink Frost'	Florida Anise-tree	6-10	☉	☁	3 g, 2-3	\$45
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A vigorous shrub with a compact growth habit and white and green foliage that highlights deep red maroon spring flowers. Variegated leaves turn pink-rose in cooler weather. Loves moist, well-drained soil. N

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Swamp Hobbit'	Florida Anise-tree	<1	☉	☁	3 g, <1	\$55
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Evergreen groundcover with showy maroon flowers and excellent deer resistance. Hardy in Delaware. What's unusual about this plant is the internodes are very short, making it an incredibly dwarf plant. N PATRON EVENING ONLY

Latin Name	Common Name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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<i>Illicium floridanum</i> 'Thayer'	Shady Lady™ Florida Anise-tree	6-10	☉	☁	1 g, 1-2	\$35
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Evergreen shrub with an upright habit and fragrant, undulating leaves with creamy white margins, perfect for lighting up deep shade. Leaves turn pink-rose in cold weather. Soft pink, strap-like flowers in spring. N

<i>Illicium floridanum</i> var. <i>album</i>	Florida Anise-tree	6-10	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$35
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Uncommon white-flowered selection. Star-shaped flowers appear in spring. A native to the Gulf Coastal, spreads 4-6' and grows best in moist soil. N

<i>Illicium henryi</i>	Henry Anise-tree	6-12	☉	☁	3 g, 1-2	\$35
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Dirr writes: "A virtual unknown in American gardens . . . might prove a genuine gem. . ." A native of China, where it grows on cliffs and in scrub in gorges, with waxy pink to coral, even red, flowers May-June. PATRON EVENING ONLY

<i>Illicium lanceolatum</i>	Guandong Star Anise	8-10	☉	☁	3 g, 1.5-2	\$35
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Upright, narrow evergreen shrub with leathery, aromatic leaves when crushed. Small pink flowers between May and June followed by star-shaped seed capsules.

<i>Illicium mexicanum</i>	Mexican Anise-tree	8-10	☉	☁	1 g, 1	\$25
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A close relative of the southeastern native *Illicium floridanum*, with long, somewhat more pointed glossy leaves, slightly larger red flowers, and a bloom period spring through fall. Although best grown in full to part shade, Mexican Anise will adapt to full sun if enough soil moisture is provided. Plant in protected location if not in Zone 7. Spreads to 3-6', prune as necessary.

<i>Illicium mexicanum</i> 'Aztec Fire'	Mexican Anise-tree	8-10	☉	☁	1 g, <1	\$25
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A natural pyramidal growth habit, glossy dark evergreen leaves, and minimal need for pruning combine to make this a highly desirable plant in the garden. Two-inch wide dark red-maroon flowers and a bloom period spring-fall. Has survived in UDBG's Hydrangea Garden four years with no dieback.

<i>Illicium parviflorum</i>	Ocala Anise	8-12	☉	☁	3 g, 3-4	\$35
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Great landscape potential though seldom seen in gardens. Tolerates extremely moist soils as well as drier situations. Olive green, leathery leaves, with yellow-green flowers May-June. N

<i>Illicium parviflorum</i> 'Florida Sunshine'	Ocala Anise	5-8	☉	☁	1 g, 1-2	\$35
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Striking chartreuse-gold leaves enliven the shade garden. As the weather cools, the leaf color turns a brighter yellow, then near parchment color by midwinter contrasted by brilliant red cast to upper stems. Yellow spring flower. N