

## Glossy Abelia Stands the Test of Time

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*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Glossy abelia is a dependable, pest-free, drought-tolerant shrub that flowers all summer.*

**S**ome mornings when I'm on my best behavior, I walk a couple of miles for exercise, general health, and just because it makes me feel good. Furthermore, these morning walks give me an opportunity to see plants and flowers blooming around the neighborhood.

On several mornings this summer, I walked by a house that had a beautiful small tree blooming at the corner of the house. Flowers were white clusters that were quite visible from the street. I knew that it was not a crape myrtle, but I could not for the life of me figure out what it was.

One morning in a brave move on my part, I simply entered the yard for a closer look. Amiable Spouse always hangs back on such excursions. He cautions that one day I'm going to get shot. I knew, however, that the house was the home of one of my garden club friends, so I was not afraid. Much to my surprise, and at close range, I discovered that this small tree was glossy abelia.

*Abelia x grandiflora* is a good choice for gardens needing moderately salt tolerant plants. The most common hybrid, often called glossy abelia, is evergreen to semi-evergreen. Funnel-shaped white flowers flushed with pink are borne in profusion for most of the summer. Leaves are lustrous dark green in summer, turning to shades of bronzy red in fall. New growth is mostly red. In most of Florida it is evergreen, though it is semi-evergreen in the upper reaches of its range (to Zone 5).

Those of us who were born and raised in the South remember the glossy abelia in our grandparents' and parents' yards. This dependable, old-time favorite is often grown as a clipped hedge, but to many it is more beautiful when allowed to grow into its naturally rounded, fountain-like form. Arching branches spread out to form a dense, rounded shrub that usually tops out at six feet tall and wide. The small tree at my friend's house was closer to 8 or 10 feet tall. Butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees are frequent visitors.

Lower growing varieties exist that may be better suited to smaller landscapes. *Abelia x grandiflora* 'Francis

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Mason' grows three to four feet tall and has pink flowers and new leaves that are rich yellow. Other cultivars include 'Prostrata', which reaches about one and a half to two feet tall, is more compact, and has smaller leaves that turn purple-green in winter; and 'Sherwood,' which tops out at three to four feet tall with a bit wider spread. It is a good plant for massing in sun or partial shade. 'Edward Goucher' averages five by five feet at maturity and bears clear pink flowers.

Glossy abelia is easily maintained. It has no serious pests and requires only occasional pruning to keep it attractive. Hard pruning in late winter will rejuvenate old plants. Flowers are produced on new wood, so they will flower the same year after drastic winter pruning. If the natural, fountain shape is wanted, old canes should be pruned from the center of the plant at ground level.

Drought tolerance is also a winning feature of this shrub. On a vacant lot behind my house, one grows and blooms dependably every summer with nary a drop of irrigation water. I promise myself each time I notice it among the overgrown weeds, briars, and yaupons on the vacant lot, that I will take a cutting and try to get it started in a dry spot in my landscape. Until now, it has only been a good intention.

Maybe now I'll rouse myself into action. I'm convinced that glossy abelia will be a long-lasting and beautiful addition to my landscape. After all, it has stood the test of time.

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