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Maine Natural Areas Program

Clethra alnifolia (L.)

Sweet Pepper-bush

- [State Rank](#): S2
- [Global Rank](#): G5
- [State Status](#): Special Concern

Habitat: Swamps and moist woods. [Hardwood to mixed forest (forest, upland); Forested wetland]

Range: Florida to Texas , north to southern Maine and west to southeastern New York.

Aids to Identification: Showy racemes of fragrant white flowers with long, protruding styles are a prominent feature of this summer-blooming shrub. The smooth, almost shiny, alternate leaves are ovate, toothed above



the middle, and have short petioles. The shrub grows 1-3 m tall, with frequent suckering at the base. It resembles heath plants (*Ericaceae*) in many respects. However, the presence of stellate hairs visible with a 10x hand lens serves to distinguish it from these plants.

Ecological characteristics: Grows in swampy woods or thickets near ponds, may be locally abundant.

Phenology: Flowers July through August.

Family: Clethraceae

Synonyms: *Clethra alnifolia* L. var. *tomentosa* (Lam.) Michx.; *Clethra tomentosa* Lam.

Known Distribution in Maine: This rare plant has been documented from a total of 10 town(s) in the following

county(ies): Hancock, Sagadahoc, York.

Reason(s) for rarity: Natural scarcity of suitable (i.e. calcareous) habitat. Scarce throughout its range.

Conservation considerations: This plant is restricted statewide to southern Maine. Populations may be (or some may have been) vulnerable to conversion of their habitat to residential or commercial use, as many occur in small wetlands.



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