

PONDBERRY / SOUTHERN SPICEBUSH / SWAMP SPICEBUSH Lindera melissifolia (Laurel Family)

by Dr. Kim D. Coder, Professor, Warnell School, University of Georgia

Swamp spicebush is an aromatic, deciduous shrub less than a meter (3.3 feet) tall which forms dense thickets. Numerous stems have hairy young twigs and buds.

Leaves are drooping, alternate, 6-16cm (2.4-6.3 inches) long, 2-6cm (0.8-2.4 inches) wide, with a dark green upper-surface and a pale green under-surface covered with soft hairs. Leaf is an elongated oval shape with a rounded base and a long tapered, pointed tip. When crushed, leaves smell like sassafras.

Flowers in March. Male and female flowers grow on different plants and appear before the leaves. Flowers are small, bright yellow, and grouped in tight clusters.

Fruits in June and July. Fruit is bright red, fleshy, elliptical and 10-12 mm (0.4-0.5 inches) long. Fruit contains a hard, one-seeded pit.

There are two species similar to swamp spicebush. One is a genus mate common spicebush (Lindera benzoin) is taller (2-5m (6.5-16.4 feet)) with spreading (not drooping) leaves, tapered (not rounded) leaf

bases and a strong benzene odor when leaves are crushed. The other similar species is pond spice (*Litsea aestivalis*) is taller and has shorter, more oblong, leathery leaves.

Swamp spicebush is one of the rarest small shrubs. It is found in shallow sink-hole depressions, along margins of swamps and ponds, and other wet areas of the Coastal Plain. It is found around swampy hardwood sites often in standing water and in soils that never dry.

Clearing or forest harvesting can raise water levels and disrupt habitat. Draining or deepening wet areas and disturbing soil reduce habitat.

Figure 1 provides a general regional distribution. This species is considered native in 9 states. It is federally listed as endangered. Figure 2 shows the county distribution in Georgia. This species is found in the upper Coastal Plain in south central and southwest Georgia.

Figure 1: General distribution in the Southeastern US.

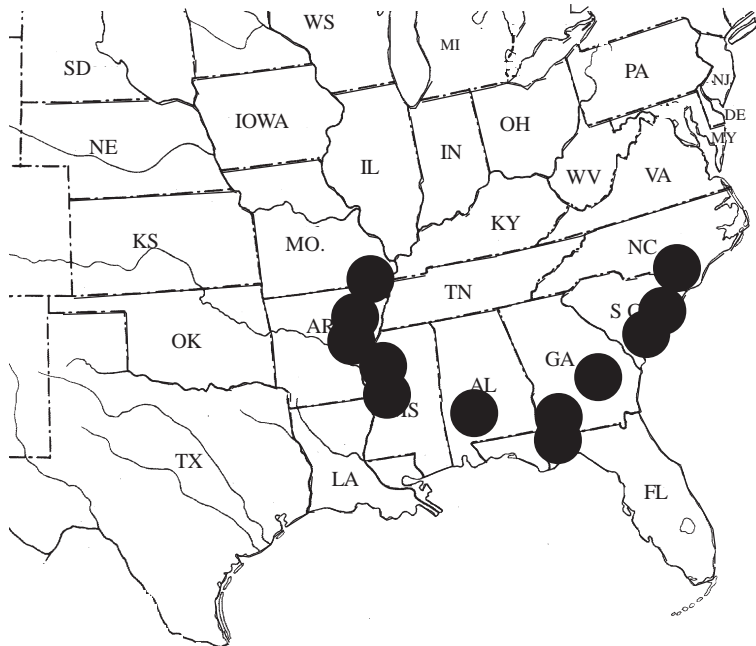
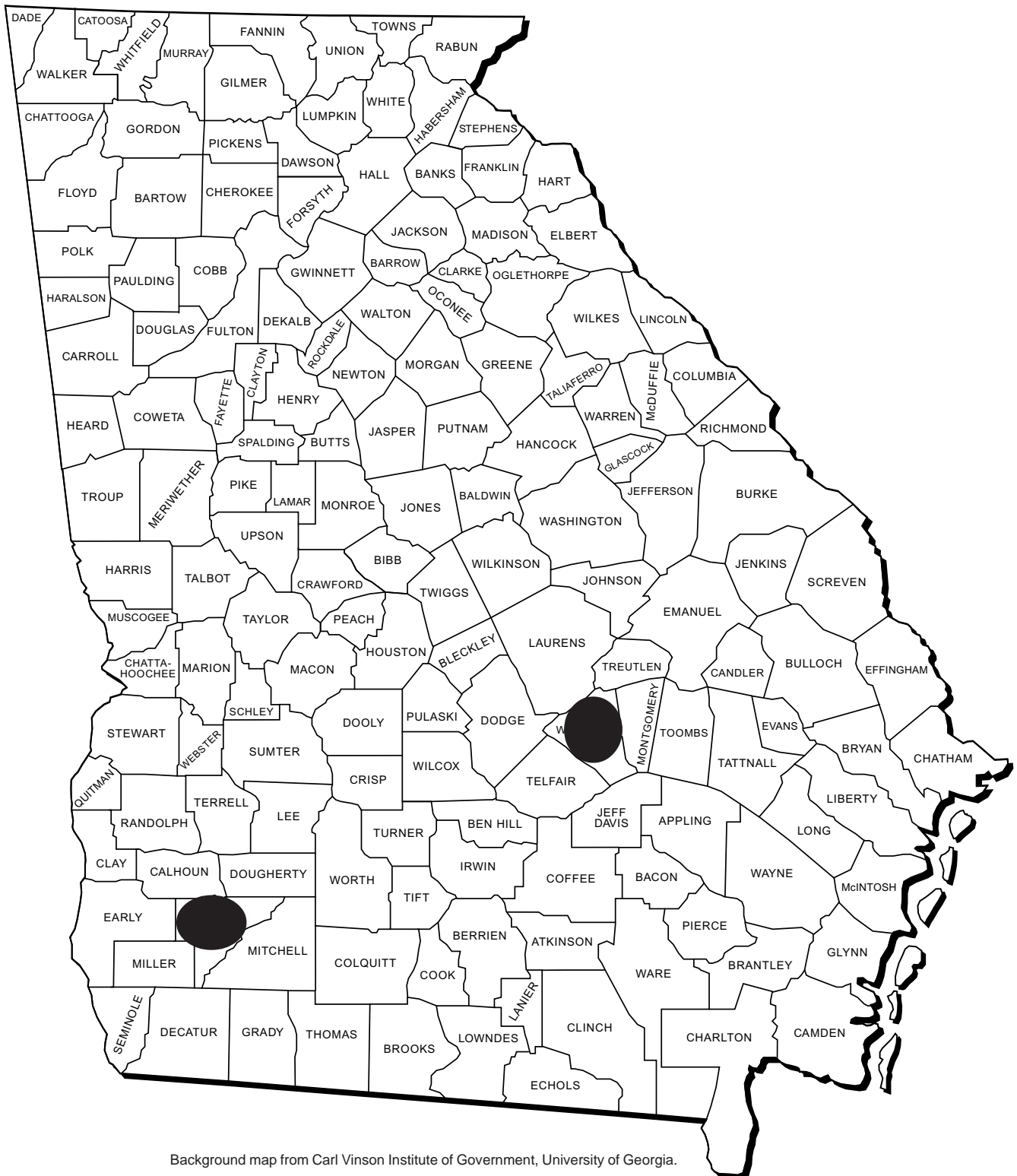


Figure 2: County distribution in Georgia.





Habitat appearance in early Spring (above), and habitat area in late Summer (below). (photo credits Dr. Kim D. Coder)



Plants in bloom in early Spring.

(photo credits Dr. Kim D. Coder)



Male and female flowers on
different plants in Early Spring.

(photo credits Dr. Kim D. Coder)



Clumps of stems with leaves.
(late Summer).

(photo credits Dr. Kim D. Coder)



Leaves front and back. (late Summer)
(photo credits Dr. Kim D. Coder)



Twigs, leaves,
and fruit.
(late Summer)

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