

## Calycanthus, a Shrub for any Garden

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There are two *Calycanthus* species that are endemic to North America, *Calycanthus floridus* (the Eastern Sweetshrub) and *Calycanthus occidentalis*, the (Western Sweetshrub).

*Calycanthus floridus* also known as the Eastern Allspice, is a good deciduous shrub and is useful as a specimen plant or in a mixed border, whereas *Calycanthus occidentalis* is possibly better used in a wildlife garden. *Calycanthus floridus* flowers from May to July, is usually red, with a spicy fragrance. There is now an improved variety named 'Aphrodite', and there is also a white form, *Calycanthus floridus* 'Athens'.



*Calycanthus floridus*



*Calycanthus floridus* 'Athens'

There is another species, with the rather long name of *Sinocalycanthus chinensis* from Eastern China. This is a very striking plant with bright green aromatic leaves that turn a good yellow in the autumn. The flowers are very striking, 7cm wide, borne at the end of shoots of current year growth in the summer, with white petals and a



yellow centre, somewhat reminiscent of Magnolias, which isn't surprising as they are both of the same clade. The flowers and stem have a spicy fragrance similar to the American plants. *Sinocalycanthus chinensis* was first introduced into Britain by our HPS president Roy Lancaster, who first had it flowering in his own Hampshire garden in 1989.

In my garden it has grown about two metres in twenty years, quite slow, and seems to be free from any pests or diseases and it flowered after two years. The seed pods are conical shape with three or more brown seeds within, which remain on the plant throughout the winter.

### *Sinocalycanthus chinensis*

In 1991 a student in North Carolina State University, USA crossed *Sinocalycanthus chinensis* with *Calycanthus floridus* creating a hybrid which is superior to both parents and named *Calycanthus raulstonii* 'Hartlage Wine'. This was first grown in

Raulston Arboretum, North Carolina. This plant has wonderful large, deep red flowers with white inner petals and a pleasant fragrance. The plant I have grown is now ten years old, about two metres tall and wide. It starts to flower from early summer and continues to produce flowers until quite late summer and seems to have no damage from any pests or diseases. The other hybrid I have is *Calycanthus* 'Venus'. This one has a complicated heritage which includes 'Hartlage Wine' but in my opinion, whilst interesting, is not as spectacular as 'Hartlage Wine', the outer petals are white with smaller red centre but the petals always look a little untidy to me. Our soil is neutral to slightly acid, though I believe that all the *Calycanthus* are quite happy in most good soils.



*Calycanthus raulstonii* 'Hartlage Wine'



*Calycanthus* 'Venus'