



Rare Plants of Louisiana

Lindera melissifolia – pondberry Laurel family (Lauraceae)

Rarity Ranks: SH/G2/Fed. listed endangered

Range: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MO, MS, NC, SC

Recognition:

- 1) Deciduous, thicket-forming shrub with green stems and alternate somewhat drooping leaves
- 2) Leaves resemble persimmon and smell like sassafras when bruised
- 3) Small clusters of yellow flowers appear before leaves erupt in March and are arranged alternately on the stems
- 4) Leaves have yellow fall color that makes the plant easy to spot
- 5) Stems often exhibit die-back due to a fungal pathogen
- 6) Fruits are bright red and appear August through Fall
- 7) Fruit stalks bear a swollen expanded disk at point of fruit attachment



Flowering Time: March – before leaves erupt; **Fruit** – August - Fall

Light Requirement: Shade of forest understory (some populations may be on forest edges)

Wetland Indicator Status: OBL – almost always occurs in wetlands

Habitat: Bottomland hardwoods – collected in early 1800s from “low woods, banks of the Ouachita River near the Arkansas line”. Historically known from small ponds on Macon Ridge in Morehouse and West Carroll Parishes. These ponds are known as spicewood ponds and are presumably named for pondberry in reference to the aromatic quality of the plant. May potentially occur in the Mississippi River floodplain forests of northeast Louisiana. Old growth forests, which are exceedingly rare, are the best places to look. Forests that have only been selectively cut have the possibility of supporting pondberry. Areas that have been “slicked off” and farmed/pastured and then reforested will not have pondberry. Pondberry has not been recorded in Louisiana in over 150 years.

Threats:

- 1) Conversion of habitat from forest to agriculture, which has happened on a large scale in LA
- 2) Alteration of hydrology – e.g. leveeing natural ponds to hold more water or draining habitat
- 3) Off-target herbicide application from adjacent agricultural operations
- 4) Pollution of ponds by pesticides and fertilizer from adjacent agriculture



Beneficial management practices:

- 1) Buffer isolated ponds when harvesting timber and where ponds occur near agricultural operations
- 2) Utilize single-tree or group selection in forest management rather than clear cutting
- 3) Refrain from modifying hydrology of natural isolated ponds
- 4) Take care to minimize chances of isolated forested ponds being affected by aerial herbicide and pesticide application



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Pondberry in Delta National Forest, Mississippi. Here it occurs both on high sites with sweetgum and palmetto and in low wet swales with Nuttall oak.

References:

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