

Franklinia alatamaha

F r a n k l i n t r e e



<https://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/plantis400/Profiles/EF/Franklinia>

Many trees throughout the Arboretum put on a show of delightful colors in the fall as their leaves begin to change and their fruits ripen. For a few plants, the fall is also a time to flower. The most lovely of the fall flowering trees, the Franklinia, begins to flower in late August/early September and may continue into October. The large white blossoms resemble stewartia or camellia flowers with five white petals and yellow centers that are a favorite of the local bees. Interestingly, the leaves may begin to change color before the flowers begin to drop their petals.

Extinct in the Wild

The *Franklinia* has an interesting history. In the late 1700s, self-taught botanist and plant collector John Bartram was searching frontier lands for new plants to introduce into cultivation. He collected seeds and plants for his own use and to send to fellow plant collectors. In 1765, he and his son, William, discovered this plant on the banks of the Altamaha River in Georgia. Several years later William again found the plant. But by the early 1800s this plant had vanished from the wild. Why did it become extinct? One theory is that the tidal river shifted and the plants were consumed by swamp land.

The *Franklinia* was named for Bartram's friend and fellow plant collector, Benjamin Franklin.

Conservation at the Arboretum

The Arboretum maintains many species in its living collection which have become rare in the wild including nine North American species which are designated as nationally threatened plants.

They include *Amelanchier nantucketensis* (Nantucket serviceberry), *Diervilla sessilifolia* (southern bush-honeysuckle), *Diervilla rivularis* (mountain bush-honeysuckle), *Gaylussacia brachycera* (box huckleberry), *Ilex collina* (longstalk holly), *Rhododendron vaseyi* (pinkshell azalea), *Rhododendron prunifolium* (plum leaf azalea), *Spiraea virginiana* (Virginia spirea), and *Viburnum bracteatum* (bracted arrowwood).

Two of the largest *Franklinia* plants in North America (2428-3*A and 2428-3*B, accessioned in 1905) reside in the Explorers Garden on Bussey Hill.

✱ Can you find them?

