STAR ANISE

*(Illicium)*

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This year we have selected the genus *Illicium* as our featured woody plant. *Illicium* is an uncommon garden plant with fantastic attributes. The genus *Illicium* has traditionally been the sole member of the Illiciaceae, but more modern sources recognize it as being in the Schisandraceae (the starvine family). Those of us that enjoy the spice and earthiness of “star anise” have appreciated the attributes of *Illicium verum*, a species native to southwest China. The genus *Illicium* has approximately 30 species, but only two are native to the United States, *I. floridanum* and *I. parviflorum*. In cultivation these two species have been joined by *I. anisatum*, *I. henryi*, *I. lanceolatum*, *I. parviflorum*, and some have also been bred with *I. mexicanum* to create a range of interesting evergreen shrubs for the garden. Over the last two years UDBG staff has been acquiring both the straight species and unusual cultivars to add to the sale.

All the *Illicium* offered for sale are broadleaved evergreen plants and most have lustrous thick leaves. The genus name *Illicium* comes from the Latin name *illicio* meaning allure, referring to the aromatic scent or spice released by bruised or crushed leaves. *Illicium* is resistant to most pests and diseases and does well in shade locations. Plants contain the chemical Safrol which gives it its characteristic smell and makes it highly undesirable to deer and insect predation. *Illicium* is becoming more common in southern gardens in the United States and is not commonly utilized in the mid-Atlantic region though it should be because of its evergreen nature and shade tolerance.

The native *Illicium floridanum* (Florida Anise-tree) is one of the more available *Illicium* in the trade, and its characteristics are what many think of when discussing the genus *Illicium*. Its evergreen leaves are dark green on the top and a paler green below. The leaves are shaped like an ellipse or lance-head and are up to 6” long by 3” wide. The leaf margin is smooth, giving the leaves a very clean look. The leaves are clustered at the tips of the branches, giving the appearance of being whorled. The leaf petiole is bright red, adding a subtle touch of color to the winter landscape. The whole plant—twigs, leaves, and flowers—is noted for its aromatic fragrance. The Florida Anise-tree is actually a shrub that is upright and very full even in shade, another desirable characteristic for gardeners. It flowers even in the densest of shade, and in its native southern habitat, can be found growing in seepy, primordial environments. Plants can be 6-10’ high with the same spread. The flowering period is April to May, but occasional flowers have been observed into September at UDBG.

We are lucky to be able to offer *Illicium floridanum* var. *album* in the sale this year. The flowers on this variety are white, but the variety *album* has the same large flower size as *I. floridanum*. The leaves of the variety are slightly lighter in color than the species and the plants are often smaller in habit. Both the species and variety are hardy in zones 6 to 9.

The *Illicium anisatum* (Anise-tree) has flowers that are creamy white (sometimes greenish-yellow) and are only 1” across. The flowers have up to 30 individual petals, but unlike other species the flowers are not fragrant. The flowering period is earlier than other species, occurring from March to April. *I. anisatum* has a more formal look with lustrous dark green foliage.

Another species of *Illicium* uncommonly seen in northern gardens is *Illicium henryi* (Henry’s Anise-tree). Like most *Illicium*, this deer resistant plant can also tolerate both drought and wet conditions. The flowers are unique in color, ranging from a pale pink, to coral, or even red. Like most members of the genus, the flowers are on the large evergreen side, barely reaching 1 inch across. The plants can be up to 12’ tall and equally wide, making it a small evergreen tree or shrub.
that blends well into the landscaped garden. However, when grown in full sun, plants are much more compact. Hardy to zone 7 and protect from winter winds.

*Illicium lanceolatum* (Guangdong Star Anise) has the narrowest leaf of any we offer. The foliage can be up to 6" long but is only 1.5" wide; very aromatic when crushed. The new leaves emerge a bright red and mature to a dark green. The leaves are often clustered at the branch tips of this species giving it a whorled appearance like *I. floridanum*. The Guangdong Star Anise has a small pink flower and has been observed to flower in two-week periods between May and June, with sparse flowering occurring up to a month after.

*Illicium mexicanum* (Mexican Anise-tree) is an ornamental species that is found in gardens as both hybrid and as straight species. Like *I. floridanum*, the flowers of *I. mexicanum* are large and red-maroon. These flowers appear in spring and continue into summer. *I. mexicanum* is the longest flowering of any of the species. To grow this species successfully in the Delaware Valley, *I. mexicanum* needs to be placed in rich garden soil with good drainage and in a sheltered site.

Another species offered for sale, *I. parviflorum*, the Ocala Anise-tree or Yellow Anise-tree, is also an upright shrub but with a more pyramidal habit. A rare Florida endemic, *I. parviflorum* is unique in that it can be clonal or suckering, which creates some unique opportunities for its use in the landscape. The leaves are 2–4" long and up to 2" wide with a blunt or rounded tip. The leaves are more of an olive-green on both surfaces, giving the gardener a new evergreen color to experiment with in the winter landscape. Flowers are inconspicuous, but the observant collector may appreciate its small yellow flowers.

We are excited to offer additional *Illicium* cultivars outside of what is outlined in this summary. Some unique cultivars provide characteristics that enhance the garden of both the excited neophyte and the discerning collector. All these *Illicium* do best in partial shade in moist well-drained organic soil. Many of them can tolerate drought conditions, and *I. henryi* and *I. parviflorum* are even known to tolerate extremely wet soils.

We hope that you will be as enchanted by this genus as we have been while preparing for the sale.
**Florida Anise-tree**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
An evergreen groundcover with showy maroon flowers and excellent deer resistance. Hardy in Delaware. What’s unusual about this plant is the internodes are very short, which makes it an incredibly dwarf plant. 

**Shady Lady™ Florida Anise-tree**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
A vigorous selection of our southern native shrub with unusual pewter-colored foliage. Hardy Zone 7.

**Sandpiper™ Water Anise**  
*Illicium anisatum*  
An upright, narrow evergreen shrub with leathery, aromatic leaves when crushed. Small pink flowers between May and June followed by star-shaped seed capsules.

**Guandong Star Anise**  
*Illicium anisatum*  
A close relative of the southeastern native *Illicium floridanum*, with long, somewhat narrower, and more pointed glossy leaves, slightly larger red flowers, and a bloom period spring through fall. Although best grown in full to part shade, Mexican Anise will adapt to full sun if enough soil moisture is provided. Plant in protected location if not in Zone 7. Spreads to 5–6’, prune as necessary.

**Guangdong Star Anise**  
*Illicium anisatum* var. *album*  
A natural pyramidal growth habit, glossy dark evergreen leaves, and minimal need for pruning combine to make this a highly desirable plant in the garden. Two-inch wide dark red-marrow flowers and a bloom period spring–fall. Has survived in UDBG’s Hydrangea Garden four years with no dieback.

**Ocala Anise**  
*Illicium anisatum*  
A close relative of the southeastern native *Illicium floridanum*, with long, more pointed glossy leaves, slightly larger red flowers, and a bloom period in spring. A native to the Gulf Coastal, spreads 4–6’ and grows best in moist soil.

**Purple Glaze™ Anise-tree**  
*Illicium anisatum*  
Uncommon white-flowered selection. Star-shaped flowers appear in spring. A native to S. China, Japan and Taiwan growing in scrub and forest at low altitudes.

**Grey Ghost**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
A vigorous shrub with a compact growth habit and white and green foliage that highlights deep red maroon spring flowers. Variegated leaves turn pink-rose in cooler weather. Loves moist, well-drained soil.

**Ocala Anise**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
Spreads to 3–6’, prune as necessary.

**‘Grey Ghost’**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
A close relative of the southeastern native *Illicium floridanum*, with long, slightly larger red flowers, and a bloom period spring through fall. Although best grown in full to part shade, Mexican Anise will adapt to full sun if enough soil moisture is provided. Plant in protected location if not in Zone 7. Spreads to 5–6’, prune as necessary.

**‘Alba’**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
A rare form with white flowers. Spreads to 3–6’, prune as necessary.

**‘Pink Flowered’**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
A two-inch starfish-like pale pink flowers in spring displayed against aromatic leaves on evergreen shrub. Prefers moist soil. 4–6’ spread.

**‘Yellow Moon’**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
A shrub with bright yellow flowers in spring. Prefers full sun. 4–6’ spreading.

**‘Swamp Hobbit’**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
An extremely dwarf form of *I. floridanum* with maroon leaves. Hardy in Delaware. What’s unusual about this plant is the internodes are very short, which makes it an incredibly dwarf plant.

**‘Pebblebrook’**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
A vigorous selection of our southern native shrub with unusual pewter-colored foliage. Hardy Zone 7.

**‘Florida Sunshine’**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
A close relative of the southeastern native *Illicium floridanum*, with long, slightly larger red flowers, and a bloom period spring through fall. Although best grown in full to part shade, Mexican Anise will adapt to full sun if enough soil moisture is provided. Plant in protected location if not in Zone 7. Spreads to 5–6’, prune as necessary.

**‘Frontier Fire’**  
*Illicium floridanum*  
A vigorous shrub with a compact growth habit and white and green foliage that highlights deep red maroon spring flowers. Variegated leaves turn pink-rose in cooler weather. Loves moist, well-drained soil.

**‘Grey Ghost’**  
*Illicium mexicanum*  
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