

Glossy abelia - *Abelia x grandiflora*

Shrub Profile

By: James Robbins



You could almost call this a signature broadleaf evergreen shrub of the South. Cultivars of glossy abelia (*Abelia x grandiflora*) can be found in almost every yard across the South in both full sun and partial shade. It is hard to be critical of glossy abelia since it does have a significant flower display over many months, has very clean foliage, and is generally pest free. In addition, this shrub is a magnet for butterflies!

Flowers, which first emerge in late May, will continue through fall. The 1"-long, tubular flowers can be white or a soft pink. Although flowers are most prolific in June and July, the overall flower display is not quite as dramatic as some other flowering shrubs. After each flower fades, brightly colored pink or coral sepals appear, giving the impression that more flowers have developed. It is the combination of tubular flowers and colorful sepals that creates the overall effect. Flowers are born at the tips of new growth, so flowers will be produced during the growing season as new growth develops.

The small, almost tear-drop shaped glossy leaves are a dark green during the growing season. Depending on your location, your abelia may develop a rich, deep maroon winter leaf color. The further north your location, the more this plant acts as a semi-evergreen and will lose more foliage.

Glossy abelia is very adaptable to sun and soil situations. It typically grows best in full sun but will grow fairly well in partial sun situations. Foliage density will decrease as the amount of shade increases. Once established, this is a fairly drought-tolerant plant.

The cascading branches will grow 5–6' tall and wide. Most of the newer cultivars are smaller in size in the range of 3–4' tall. You will rarely if ever have to prune glossy abelia unless you want to impose some size control. Since flowering occurs on new growth, you can be quite aggressive and still have a reasonable flower/sepal display.

Disease or insect problems on glossy abelia are rare. The plant can be used in a mass or as an individual. The small leaves and arching branches give the plant a very soft, graceful textural effect.

The garden center trade is full of named cultivars including 'Edward Goucher,' 'Sherwood,' and 'John Creech.' Two common variegated leaf cultivars include Confetti™ and 'Sunrise.' The University of Arkansas Plant Evaluation Program has evaluated 'Sunrise,' and we are not impressed. The variegated plant reverts back to the green-leaved form very easily. The green-leaved part of the plant will easily outgrow the variegated part unless you stay on top of the pruning.

While we are discussing abelia, we should mention another, more rare option that is very impressive. The Chinese abelia (*Abelia chinensis*) is one of the parents of the hybrid glossy abelia. While this is the deciduous part of the glossy abelia hybrid, leaf retention is almost evergreen in Arkansas. Leaves, although not as glossy or dark green as the hybrid, are still very clean and attractive. What is most impressive is the unbelievable flower/sepal display—a huge bang for your buck. Plants start flowering on new growth in June and the striking pink sepals will continue to provide an impact until mid-fall. The only reservation about Chinese abelia is the growth habit. This plant typically throws wild sprays of branches that will likely require an occasional heading back to keep the plant more tidy. If you can find Chinese abelia, you need to give it a try.



Common Name: glossy abelia

Varieties to look for: 'Edward Goucher,' 'Sherwood,' Confetti™, Kaleidoscope™, 'Canyon Creek,' 'Rose Creek'

Flower color: white or faint pink

Blooming period: summer

Type: broadleaf evergreen shrub

Size: medium; 6' tall x 6' wide

Exposure: full sun

Soil: adaptable

Watering: moist best

When to prune: anytime

Suggested use: mixed shrub border

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