

PONDSPICE

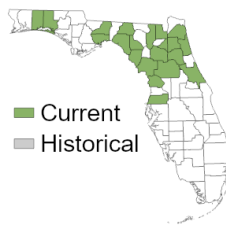
Litsea aestivalis (L.) Fern.

Synonyms: *Glabraria geniculata* (Walter) Britton; *Laurus aestivalis* L.; *Litsea geniculata* (Walter) G. Nicholson; *Malapoenna geniculata* Coult.

Family: Lauraceae (laurel)

FNAI Ranks: G3/S2

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Endangered



Leaves narrowly elliptic growing on twigs with distinctive zigzag form.
Margin of depression marsh at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area.
Photo by Kelly Anderson.

Field Description: Shrub or small tree to 5 m tall. **Twigs** are zigzag and odorless. **Leaves** 1 - 4 cm long, deciduous, simple, alternate, somewhat leathery, smooth, oblong to lance-shaped, margins entire and slightly thickened. **Flowers** are unisexual and tiny, with 6 yellow **sepals** and no petals, usually in clusters at the tips of branches. **Female** and **male flowers** occur on separate plants; **female flowers** with 1 ovary and 9 non-functional stamens, **male flowers** with 9 stamens, each with 4 openings on the anther. **Fruit** is fleshy, red, and round.

Similar Species: Flowers of the common spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) are very similar, but its leaves are much larger than pondspice leaves, its twigs have a spicy smell, are not zigzag, and its fruit is oval.

Related Rare Species: Bog spicebush (*Lindera subcoriacea*), state-endangered, occurs in moist to wet, shrub-dominated seepage wetlands in the western Florida panhandle. Twigs have a faint 'piney-lemon' smell when crushed and are not zigzag; leaf undersides are strongly whitened; fruit is elliptic.

Habitat: On peaty soils in edges of baygalls, flatwoods ponds, depression marshes, and cypress domes. Plants may form thickets around edges of ponds.

Best Survey Season: Flowers late winter - early spring; bright red fruits are easiest to see in mid-summer to mid-fall.

Range-wide Distribution: A Southeastern Coastal Plain endemic: Eastern MD (Wicomico County) and southeastern VA (York and Isle of Wight counties) south to North FL. In FL, found from Pasco County north and west to Okaloosa County in the panhandle.

Conservation Status: Pondspice (*Litsea aestivalis*) has 45 extant or presumed extant occurrences distributed from the western panhandle to the central peninsula in Florida as of 2024. Although over half of its populations are protected, the majority are small in size. Clearing and draining of wetlands, especially for silviculture have contributed to a great reduction in available habitat for this species. Additionally, laurel wilt disease has emerged as a threat within the last twenty years and populations in the northeastern part of its range in the state and/or in close proximity to large populations of bay trees may be especially susceptible.

Protection and Management: Populations should be monitored for effects of laurel wilt disease, especially those not visited as a part of the project conducted by Surdick and Jenkins 2010. The public should be informed about the harm of transporting wood when it may be infected with laurel wilt disease. Prescribed fires and wildfires that begin in the surrounding upland communities should be allowed to enter the wetlands where this species occurs and allowed to naturally extinguish. The hydrology of these wetlands should be maintained and any draining through the use of ditches, canals, or improperly placed firebreaks should be avoided. The use of heavy machinery should be kept away from where plants occur.

References: Godfrey 1988, Surdick and Jenkins 2010, Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2022, Wofford 1983, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011.



Flowers yellow; along margin of depression marsh at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Zigzag twigs are distinctive. Margin of depression marsh at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Fall foliage yellow growing along margin of depression marsh at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

