

***Styrax americanus* Lam.**  
STYRACACEAE

American snowbell

Synonyms: *Styrax pulverulentus* Michx.

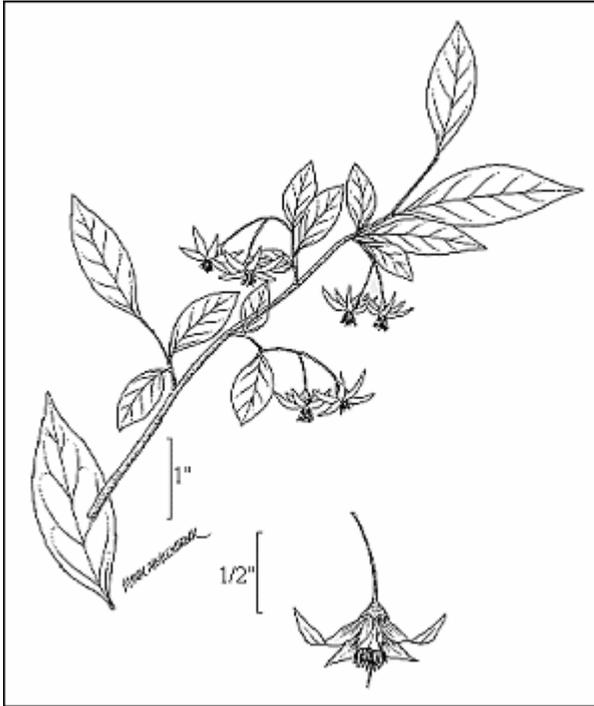


Illustration source: USDA—Soil Conservation Service, Southern Technical Center

**General Description.**—American snowbell, also known as mock orange or storax, is a deciduous shrub or small tree with a widely branched crown. It reaches 3 to 5 m in height, and the stems can reach 7.5 cm in diameter (Johnson and Hoagland 1999, Plant Identification Resource 2001). While the bark on the stems is smooth and dark grey to brown, branches range in color from green to grey to red-brown. Young stems are pubescent, becoming glabrous with age (Johnson and Hoagland 1999). The alternate, simple leaves are 2.6 to 9 cm long, ovate to elliptic, entire to finely serrate, glabrous above, and pubescent beneath (Bailey and Bailey 1976, Krüssmann 1986). The leaf apex is acute, venation is pinnate. The showy, fragrant white flowers for which the plant is noted form in racemes from April to June (Iverson and others 1999, Krüssmann 1986). American snowbell is distinguishable from bigleaf snowbell (*S. grandifolius*) by its smaller leaves and shorter flowering racemes with fewer flowers per raceme (Brown and Kirkman 1990).

**Range.**—American snowbell is found in the Southeastern United States, from Virginia south to Florida and west to Louisiana (Bailey and Bailey 1976) and eastern Texas. It is also recorded in McCurtain County in Oklahoma (Johnson and Hoagland 1999). It will grow as far north as southern Missouri, southern Illinois, Indiana, and southern Ohio but is rare, endangered or possibly extirpated in Ohio and Illinois (Ohio Department of Natural Resources 2002, Iverson and others 1999).

**Ecology.**—American snowbell grows primarily in rich, poorly-drained acidic soils along swamp margins, stream beds and lake edges, oxbow lakes, and in floodplains. (Johnson and Hoagland 1999). It grows well in the shade but will tolerate full sun. It is associated with trees commonly found in wet areas, such as baldcypress and overcup oak. Plants are particularly tender when young (Krüssmann 1986).

**Reproduction.**—American snowbell is named for its showy, fragrant, white flowers. Flowers are complete and their placement hypogynous (Iverson and others 1999). They occur in 2.5 to 12 cm long racemes, one to four flowers per raceme. Raceme stalks are pubescent. The flowers have five petals, and the white style extends beyond the 10 stamens. The calyx is shallowly five-lobed and has tiny, triangular teeth. The 6 to 8 mm subglobose fruits are one-seeded drupes that mature from July to October (Krüssmann 1986, Johnson and Hoagland 1999).

**Growth and Management.**—This species is often planted and grows well in cultivation. Since it requires moist soils and prefers shade, it can be seriously threatened by drainage and removal of the forest canopy. Its major pollinators are bees (Iverson and others 1999), and the species relies on seed dispersal for regeneration. It is, however, easily propagated from softwood cuttings (Johnson and Hoagland 1999).

**Benefits.**—American snowbell is an attractive landscape plant. Its leaves are also a preferred food of the caterpillar of *Callosamia promethea*, the promethea moth (Oehlke [no date]).

## References

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