X Gordlinia grandiflora 'Sweet Tea' by Vicki Roberts

Common name: Mountain Gordlinia
Family name: Theaceae

This is an ornamental tree/shrub in the tea family that is a hybrid between Franklinia and Gordonia. It is noted to be difficult to grow, but if given the correct conditions of full sun to partial afternoon shade and acidic soil that drains well, it grows quickly. It is semi-evergreen and is hardy in zones 7-9, with typical heights of up to 20 feet and width of 15 feet. It has large camellia like flowers up to 5 inches in diameter that are fragrant. The flowers have 5 white petals with bright yellow stamens in the center that appear in July- September. And in the fall, the leaves are showy with reds and oranges making this a tree that can really make a statement in the landscape.

I purchased this tree this year in January 2020, at the Virginia Beach Flower and Garden Show from the Chesapeake Master Gardeners, planting it immediately. It kept its red and orange fall leaves all winter until spring, when they were replaced with multiple shiny green ones. I was so surprised to find the blossoms in June and then the first bloom opened on July 20th. This truly is a very striking addition to my front yard and has garnered the attention of my neighbors out for their evening walks, enough so, that they have come to the door to ask what it is.

Photo by Vicki Roberts
References:

1. North Carolina State Extension, North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/x-gordlinia-grandiflora-sweet-tea/
2. Missouri Botanical, missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=366263