**Myrica cerifera: Southern Waxmyrtle**¹
Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**Introduction**
Multiple, twisted trunks with smooth, light grey bark, aromatic, olive green leaves, and clusters of grey-blue, waxy berries on female plants which are attractive to wildlife are just some of the reasons southern waxmyrtle is such a popular landscape plant. Most specimens form a multi-stemmed, open, rounded canopy of weak trunks and branches. This rapidly-growing, small, evergreen native tree is capable of reaching a height of 25 feet with an equal spread but is usually seen in the 10 to 20-foot range. Sometimes used as a large shrubbery screen, southern waxmyrtle is ideal for use as a small tree, the lower limbs removed to reveal its picturesque form. One, or several clustered together, provide pleasing dappled shade for terraces or patios.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** *Myrica cerifera*
- **Pronunciation:** MEER-ih-kuh ser-IF-er-uh
- **Common name(s):** Southern waxmyrtle, southern bayberry
- **Family:** Myricaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** native to North America
- **Invasive potential:** weedy native
- **Uses:** screen; deck or patio; hedge; specimen; street without sidewalk; trained as a standard; container or planter; reclamation; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median; bonsai
- **Availability:** not native to North America

![Figure 1. Middle-aged *Myrica cerifera*: Southern Waxmyrtle](image)

**Figure 1. Middle-aged *Myrica cerifera*: Southern Waxmyrtle**
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

**Figure 2. Range**

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**Description**
Height: 15 to 25 feet  
Spread: 20 to 25 feet  
Crown uniformity: irregular  
Crown shape: vase, round  
Crown density: moderate  
Growth rate: fast  
Texture: fine

**Foliage**
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire, serrate  
Leaf shape: spatulate, oblanceolate, oblong  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, fragrant  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**
Flower color: green  
Flower characteristics: not showy

**Fruit**
Fruit shape: round  
Fruit length: less than .5 inch  
Fruit covering: fleshy  
Fruit color: blue  
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**
Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns  
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure  
Breakage: susceptible to breakage

**Culture**
Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade, shade tolerant  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Aerosol salt tolerance: high

**Other**
Roots: not a problem  
Winter interest: no  
Outstanding tree: no  
Ozone sensitivity: unknown  
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown  
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**
Very tough and easily-grown, southern waxmyrtle can tolerate a variety of landscape settings from full sun to partial shade, wet swamplands or high, dry and alkaline areas. Growth is thin in total shade. It is also very salt-tolerant (soil and aerosol), making it suitable for seaside applications. It is adapted to parking lot and street tree planting, especially beneath powerlines, but branches tend to droop toward the ground, possibly hindering flow of vehicular traffic if not properly trained and pruned. Set them back from the road if used as a street tree so drooping branches will not hinder traffic. Removing excess shoot growth two times each year eliminates the tall, lanky branches and reduces the tendency for branches to droop. Some landscape managers hedge the crown into a multi-stemmed dome-shaped topiary. Plants spaced 10 feet apart, maintained in this manner, can create a nice canopy of shade for pedestrian traffic.

Plants should be watered well until established and will then require no further care. The only drawback to the plant is its tendency to sprout from the roots. This can be a nuisance as they need to be removed several times each year to keep the tree looking sharp. However, in a naturalized garden this thick growth could be an advantage, since it would provide good nesting cover for wildlife. Only female trees produce fruit provided there is a male nearby, but seeds do not appear to become a weed problem in the landscape.
The cultivar ‘Pumila’ is a dwarf form, less than three feet high. *Myrica pensylvanica*, northern bayberry, is a more cold-hardy species and the source of wax for bayberry candles.

Propagation is by seeds, which germinate easily and rapidly, tip cuttings, division of the stolons or transplanting wild plants.

**Pests**
Caterpillars and mites may occasionally attack the foliage. Webworms common in some landscapes—prune to remove infestation.

**Diseases**
Cankers may form on old branches and trunks and kill them. Also, a lethal wilt disease caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Fusarium* spp. has been recently noted attacking waxmyrtle plants in central and south Florida. The vascular tissue is irregularly stained purple but not decayed as a result of the disease. Root injury and nitrogen fertilization encourage the disease.