

Callicarpa americana American Beautyberry¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

This rapidly-growing North American native forms a rather loosely-arranged, rounded shrub, five to eight feet tall and equally wide (Fig. 1). Branches form long arches bending toward the ground and lend almost a weeping habit to older, established shrubs. The coarse, fuzzy, light green, deciduous leaves are combined with small, lavender-pink blossoms densely clustered in leaf axils from June through August. A profusion of very showy, 1/3-inch-diameter, clustered berries follow, densely packed and encircling the woody stems. These shiny purple-blue fruits are quite attractive to birds and, if not completely devoured, will persist on the stems for several weeks after the leaves drop.

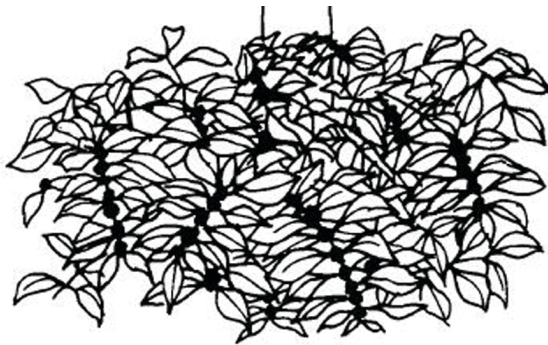


Figure 1. American beautyberry.

General Information

Scientific name: *Callicarpa americana*

Pronunciation: kal-lick-AR-puh uh-mair-rick-KAY-nuh

Common name(s): American beautyberry, American mulberry

Family: *Verbenaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: foundation; border; mass planting; container or aboveground planter; naturalizing

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 3 to 8 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: round; spreading; vase shape

Plant density: open

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Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: fragrant
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: lavender
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: purple
Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; attracts birds



Figure 3. Fruit of the American beautyberry.

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: may self-seed each year
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Its ease of maintenance and popularity with birds makes American beautyberry especially useful for the naturalized garden where it blends in well with pines, oaks, and darker leaved shrubs. Appearing best when massed together, American beautyberry can also be used as a screen or specimen. Allow plenty of room for this large, sprawling shrub unless regular pruning can be provided to control its size. The thinning-type pruning method works best for beautyberry since regular shearing removes flowers and developing fruits.

American beautyberry is relatively maintenance free and grows easily in full sun or light, dappled shade on a variety of soils. Old wood should be pruned heavily in late fall to early spring since flowers and fruit are produced on new growth.

Callicarpa americana var. *lactea* has white berries and attractive foliage. The cultivar 'Russell Montgomery' has especially nice white berries.

Propagation is by seed or softwood cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests are of major concern. Caterpillars may occasionally chew the leaves.

No diseases are of major concern.