

Callicarpa americana: American Beautyberry¹

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This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.

Introduction

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a woody deciduous shrub, native to Florida and other states in the southeastern United States. This plant has a rounded growth habit and reaches a height and spread of 8 feet (Figure 1). Older, more established beautyberry shrubs have branches that arch towards the ground in an almost weeping growth habit. The large 4- to 8-inch leaves are light green and have a coarse to fuzzy texture (Figure 2). The small pink flowers are borne in clusters in the leaf axils during the bloom season of June through August (Figure 3). Clusters of showy purple berries are densely packed and encircle the stems following the flowers, from August through October (Figure 4). Certain varieties and cultivars of American beautyberry produce white or pink berries instead of the typical purple (Figure 5). Fruit persists on the plant for several weeks after leaves are dropped, into the start of winter. These fruits are a very attractive source of food for birds and other wildlife. This plant is highly tolerant to many environmental conditions including drought, heat, wet soil, and deters browsing from deer and rabbits.

Beautyberry is commonly found in meadows, forested areas, near water bodies and in other full sun to partially shaded locations. It is well suited for a variety of uses including used as a foundation plant, as a border, planted en masse, in a container or aboveground planter, or for naturalizing an area.



Figure 1. Full form—*Callicarpa americana*: American beautyberry.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Callicarpa americana*: American beautyberry.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Flower—*Callicarpa americana*: American beautyberry.

Credit: Ryan Fessenden

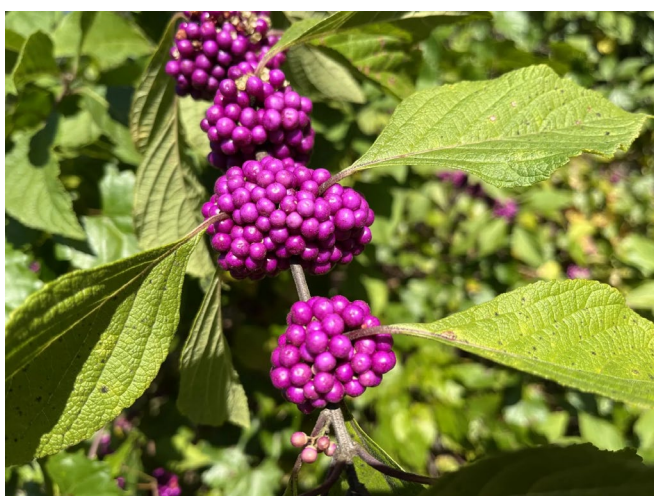


Figure 4. Fruit—*Callicarpa americana*: American beautyberry.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS

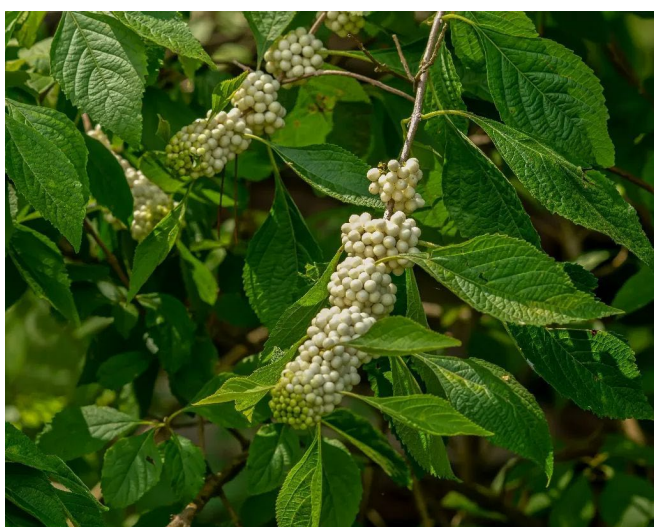


Figure 5. Fruit—*Callicarpa americana*: American beautyberry.

Credit: Donna Bollenbach via Adobe Stock

General Information

Scientific name: *Callicarpa americana*

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

Common name(s): American beautyberry, American mulberry, beautyberry

Family: *Lamiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7A through 11B (Figures 6 and 7)

USDA Hardiness Zones 7A-11A

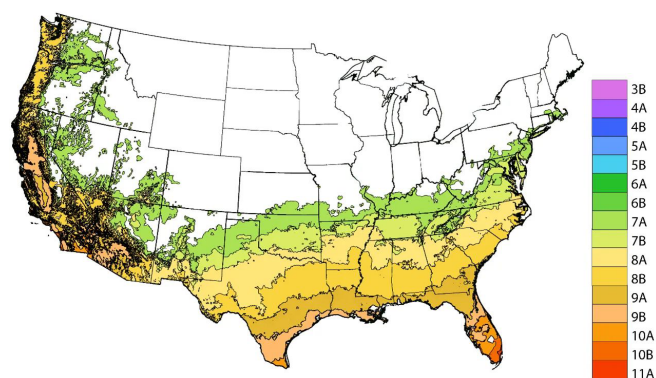


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 7A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 7B-11A

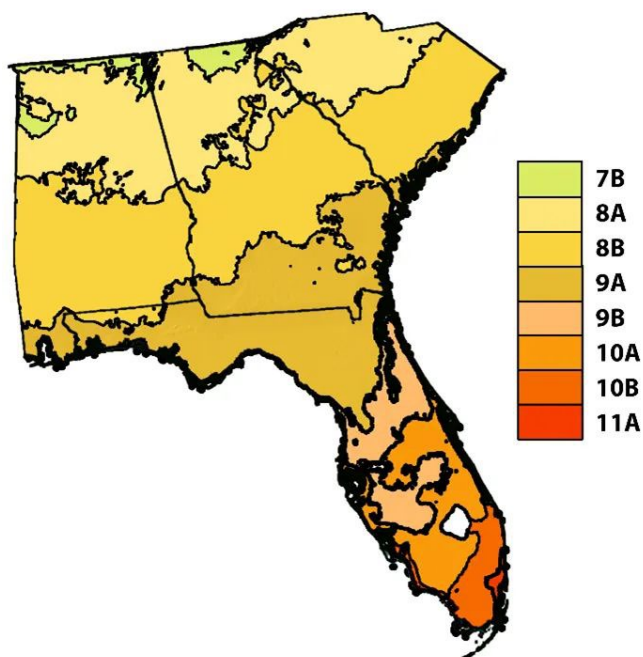


Figure 7. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 7B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

Planting month for zone 8: year-round

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

Uses: foundation; specimen; border; mass planting; container or aboveground planter; naturalizing; larval host plant

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

Description

Height: 3 to 8 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: round; spreading; vase shape; arching

Plant density: open

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; deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink

Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than 1/2 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: purple; pink; cream-white

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; attracts birds; showy

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 partial shade; plant grows in full 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: berries persist through early winter

Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

American beautyberry is a hardy, relatively maintenance free plant that grows easily in full sun or light, dappled shade in a variety of soil conditions. It is both drought tolerant and tolerant of wet soils. Old wood should be pruned heavily in late fall to early spring since flowers and fruit are produced on new growth. The berries of this plant are a highly attractive food source for a variety of wildlife including birds and small mammals. The flowers of this plant also attract pollinators. This plant is also a larval host plant for the spring azure butterfly (*Celastrina ladon*) and snowberry clearwing moth (*Hemaris diffinis*).

Beautyberry occurs naturally in many habitats of the central and southeastern United States. It may also be used in the landscape in a variety of settings including naturalizing an area, may be planted near a pond or water body, used in a pollinator garden, or as part of a rain garden. This plant will lose its leaves in the winter; however, the showy berries bring winter interest. Propagation is by seed or softwood cuttings.

Design Considerations

Easy to maintain and a favorite of birds, American beautyberry is ideal for naturalistic gardens, blending well with pines and oaks. Its large, sprawling habit works for a specimen or informal screen but requires ample space.

Companion plantings can include yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) and wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), whose evergreen forms provide year-round structure that contrasts with the beautyberry's deciduous habit. Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) is another excellent partner, offering bold foliage and vibrant summer flowers that complement the beautyberry's famous fall fruit.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

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