UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

FPS92
doi.org/10.32473/edis-fp092-1999

Callicarpa japonica: Japanese Beautyberry[1]

Keighly Graves, Wendy Wilber, Tom Wichman, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein[2]

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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

Japanese beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*) is a woody deciduous shrub that is common in the horticultural trade in eastern and southern landscapes. This plant has a round to spreading vase-shaped growth form that reaches a height and spread of 4 to 6 feet (Figure 1). Japanese beautyberry has a smaller, more compact growth form than its relative the American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*). The light green ovate leaves are serrated and turn a purplish-yellow color before dropping (Figure 2). The small pink flowers are borne in clusters in the leaf axils during the summer (Figure 3). Clusters of showy purple berries are densely packed and encircle the stems following the flowers, from fall through winter (Figure 4). Japanese beautyberry flowers attract pollinators, and birds are attracted to the berries. It is well suited for a variety of uses including as a foundation plant, as a border, for screening or privacy, planted en masse, in a container or aboveground planter, or for naturalizing an area.



Figure 1. Full form—*Callicarpa japonica*: Japanese beautyberry.
Credit: © sabrina, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Callicarpa japonica*: Japanese beautyberry.
Credit: © Yung-Lun Lin, some rights reserved (CC BY) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Callicarpa japonica:* Japanese beautyberry.
Credit: © Casper, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Callicarpa japonica*: Japanese beautyberry.
Credit: © hoho0831, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC) via iNaturalist

General Information

Scientific name: *Callicarpa japonica*

Pronunciation: kal-lick-AR-puh juh-PAW-nick-uh

Common name(s): Japanese beautyberry

Family: *Lamiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 8B (Figures 5 and 6)

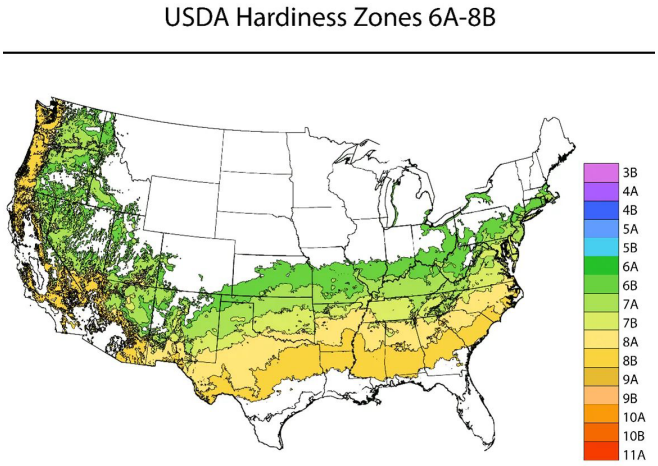


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 6A–8B.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

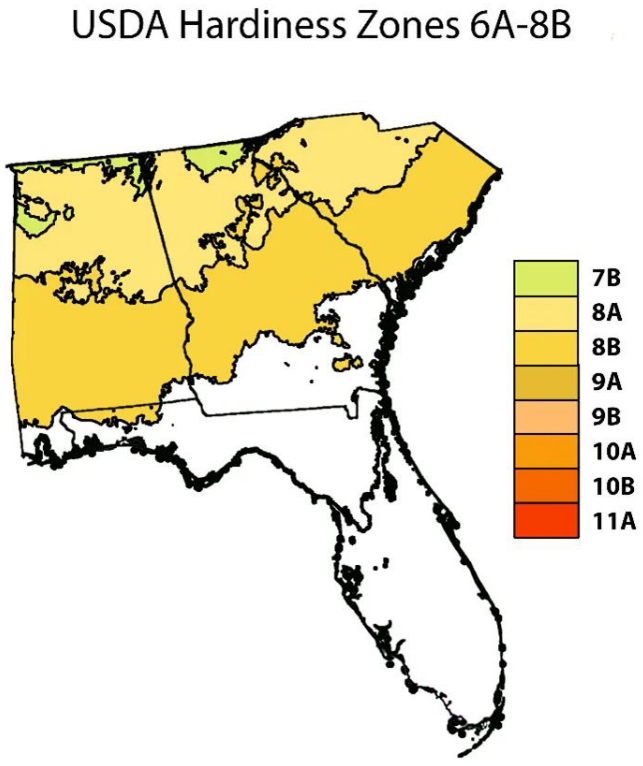


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 6A–8B.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

Planting month for zone 8: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: foundation; border; mass planting; privacy screen; container or aboveground planter; naturalizing; attracts pollinators

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

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet

Spread: 4 to 6 feet

Plant habit: round; spreading; vase shape

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

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink to 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; 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: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun; plant grows in partial shade

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

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

Use and Management

Japanese beautyberry should be located in the full sun or partial shade for best form and dense growth. Soils from acid to slightly alkaline should support this plant with little irrigation except in extended drought. Temperatures below zero often kill plants to the ground, but sprouts formed in the spring will flower and produce the showy fruit. This plant only grows in the northernmost part of Florida.

Plants can be massed together spaced 4 to 5 feet apart forming a nice border or divider. Thick growth discourages people from walking through the plant, making it well suited for controlling pedestrian traffic. Branches will droop over a wall if planted on top, making it a good choice for raised planters or containers. Whereas the native American beautyberry may be too large for smaller residential landscapes, this plant remains small and in scale with many yards. This plant may become weedy in the landscape and require maintenance to keep it within bounds.

The cultivar 'Leucocarpa' has white fruit. Propagation is by cuttings or seed.

Design Considerations

Japanese Beautyberry provides spectacular late-season color in the landscape. While its summer foliage is a pleasant green and its form is an attractive, arching mound, its true value is revealed in autumn. After the leaves drop, the long, graceful stems are studded with dense clusters of iridescent-purple berries. This provides a striking visual accent that persists well into the winter, offering color and structure when most of the garden is dormant. Place Japanese Beautyberry in the middle of a mixed border, where its unassuming summer foliage can serve as a green backdrop for other flowers before it becomes a winter focal point.

For compelling combinations, pair it with the fine, upright texture of ornamental grasses. To make the electric-violet berries truly pop, plant it against a dark evergreen backdrop using options like podocarpus, Walter's viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*), yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), or the shade-tolerant yellow anise (*Illicium parviflorum*).

Pests and Diseases

No pests of major concern. Disease issues include leafspots, stem diseases, and black mold may appear on the foliage. Proper cultural conditions encourage plant health.

[1] This document is FPS92, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised February 2023 and April 2026. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/*.

[2] Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Wendy Wilber, state program coordinator and Extension agent IV, UF/IFAS Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program; Tom Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Claire Lewis, state specialized agent II and director Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Horticultural Sciences; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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