

## American beautyberry

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa Americana*) puts on quite a show this time of year with its bright purple fruit.

I enjoy seeing this plant every fall. The profusion of berry-like fruit found along the thin branches result in the plant taking on a weeping habit. Each fruit is only about 1/3 inch in diameter but collectively form roundish clusters which encircle the stems. The berries are particularly showy in September and October. They remain on the plant even after its leaves have dropped into early winter if not eaten by birds and other wildlife.

Many species of birds will eat beautyberry fruit, including robins, cardinals, mockingbirds, brown thrashers, finches and towhees. Birds are a major method of seed dispersal for this plant.

Even though I consider the showy fruit its best attribute, the small, lavender flowers tightly bunched together along the stems during June to August are attractive, as well. The plant is not well suited for manicured, formal landscapes but can be useful in a naturalized garden.

American beautyberry is a deciduous shrub without much ornamental value during the winter. But during the growing season, its somewhat coarse, fuzzy, light green leaves look good in a setting with other darker leaved shrubs. It grows well in part shade/part sun as an understory plant beneath larger trees such as pines and oaks. Be sure to allow enough room for this sprawling shrub to develop into its mature size of three to eight feet in height with an equal spread. It may also be used as an informal screen or even as a specimen plant. But avoid using it where it will require regular shearing as the flowers and fruit are produced on new growth. Thinning out old or low growing branches is a better method of pruning this plant. American beautyberry may self seed but I have not seen this to be a bothersome problem.

American beautyberry is somewhat available in the nursery trade and is fairly easy to propagate from stem cuttings. It can be propagated from seeds, as well. In addition to the purple fruiting types, look for cultivars such as 'Russell Montgomery' that produce white fruit. There are also other nonnative species of *Callicarpa* worth looking at such as *C. dichotoma* and *C. japonica*.

American beautyberry is a low maintenance, native plant with no major pest concerns that can be a nice addition to a North Florida landscape. It is great for low maintenance landscapes and naturalized gardens. I will always have some in my landscape.

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