

Callicarpa americana L.

VERBENACEAE (also placed in LAMIACEAE alt. Labiatae)

American beautyberry

Synonyms: None

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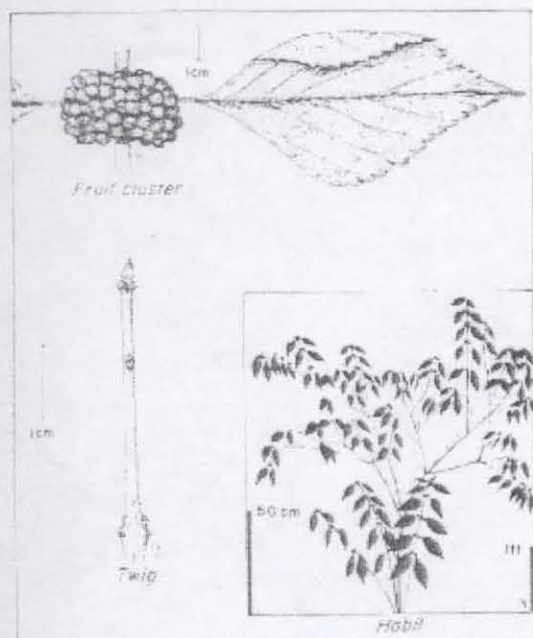


Illustration source: UDA [no date]

General Description.—American beautyberry, also known as beauty-berry, Bermuda mulberry, French mulberry, soubush, sow-berry, or Spanish mulberry, is a shrub that can reach 2.4 to 2.7 m in height but is typically shorter, averaging 0.9 to 1.8 m. The irregular, spreading bush has an open growth habit and grows as a single plant or in colonies. Bark is brown and raised lenticels are found on older stems. Branches are scurfy or tomentose, gray to reddish brown in color. The opposite, short-petioled, simple, deciduous leaves are ovate to elliptic in shape. They are pointed at both the base and the apex, and the margins are coarsely serrate. Leaves are glabrous or slightly pubescent above and pubescent with stellate trichomes below (Radford and others 1968, Martin and Mott 1997). Leaf size is variable, ranging from 7.6 to 20.3 cm in length and 5 to 12.7 cm in width.

Range.—American beautyberry ranges through the Southeastern United States from Maryland and Virginia south to Florida and west to Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. It also grows in the Bahamas, Bermuda, Cuba, northern Mexico, and in

the West Indies (Bailey and Bailey 1976, Brickell and Zuk 1996).

Ecology.—American beautyberry is a drought-tolerant perennial shrub. Classified as a pioneer species (Odenwald and Turner 1988), it is common along forest edges and fence rows, and is also a common understory plant in open pine plantations in the southeastern United States. It is found in openings after clear-cutting (Odenwald and others 1996) and in moist thickets and bordering swamps (Krüssman 1976). American beautyberry is very tolerant of fire and resprouts easily. However, it is intolerant of deep shade and is only found in the better drained areas of bottomland hardwood stands. It will grow in a variety of soil textures and in a wide pH range (USDA-NRCS 2001). Tolerant of temperatures ranging from -17°C to over 37.8°C (Martin and Mott 1997), it is cultivated for its fall display of purple to violet fruits.

Reproduction.—The perfect, bluish white to white axillary flowers first appear in early spring. The bloom period can continue through late summer. It is not uncommon to see both flowers and fruits on the same plant (Grelen and Duvall 1966). The flowers are borne in dichotomous cymes 8 to 36 mm long (Bonner in press). The 3- to 6-mm fruits are violet to purple berry-like drupes, formed in clusters that encircle the stem. Each drupe contains four small seeds that germinate without scarification or stratification, although germination can be slow. If seeds are sown in the fall, germination the following spring may be excellent (Dirr and Heuser 1987). Bonner (in press) reported that seeds can be easily cleaned using any type of macerator, even a kitchen blender for small lots. Seeds average 600 per gram. Longevity of seeds in storage is unknown, but they survive for at least 1 year in the soil seed bank and are thought to be orthodox. Orthodox seeds can be dried to a moisture content of less than 12 percent and stored under refrigeration for long periods (Roberts 1973). These seeds are transported by animals and birds. American beautyberry may also be propagated from softwood stem cuttings taken in the summer and

fall that are treated with indol-3-butyric acid (IBA; 1000 ppm) and put in a mist bed (Dirr and Heuser 1987).

Growth and Management.—American beautyberry is a short-lived shrub that is easy to grow and widely distributed in the Southeastern United States. It can be used as a landscape border and makes a good mass planting. However, regular pruning is required if it is to maintain its form and produce masses of the fruits so attractive in the fall of the year. The fruits occur only on new growth, and plants should be heavily pruned in early spring (Martin and Mott 1997). It will not do well in areas that experience flooding but can be used to restore surface-mined sites (Martin and Sick 1995). It will resprout after fire (Martin and Mott 1997) and can be easily transplanted.

Benefits.—American beautyberry is a good source of food for deer and the fruits attract birds. It can be used in reclamation work and for erosion control (Brown 1945). It easily reseeds in nature.

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