

American Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*

It's a beauty of a berry! Brightening the landscape and delighting at least forty bird species, Beautyberry is a native understory shrub in moist woods across the southern U.S. You may also know it as French Mulberry, Bunchberry, Purple Beautyberry, or Sourbush. *Calli* means "beauty" and *carpa* means "fruit."

Fast-growing, Beautyberry's pale, arching branches can extend five to eight feet tall and almost as wide. Bright green leaves have an opposite arrangement with saw-toothed edges. This is one of the last plants to leaf out in the spring because it is sensitive to frost. In late spring to early summer, small flowers appear in clusters between the leaves, leading to the "drupes," or berry clusters that encircle the stems early in the fall.



C. Fannon, wildflower.org



R. Mathews, wildflower.org

The flowers attract butterflies, and the berries are eaten by deer, armadillo, fox, opossum, raccoon, and squirrel – if the birds leave any behind! Deer may also browse the leaves for their high protein content. Even cattle have been known to eat the twigs and leaves. Native Americans used Beautyberry roots, leaves, and branches to treat colic, dizziness, dysentery, malaria, and rheumatism. Early farmers crushed the leaves and put them under horse harnesses to repel mosquitos. The Agricultural Research

Service has found that two compounds in the plant, callicarpene and intermedeol, repel biting insects.

Beautyberry grows naturally in open woods and thickets where it can receive at least some rain. It has adapted to a wide range of soil types and pH ranges. It is tolerant of fire, but not



C. Richardson, wildflower.org



Mary Grant

deep shade. My beautyberries have done very well on the east side of my house where they do not get the fierce afternoon sun. This plant needs to be cut way back in late winter, to about 12 inches above the ground. The berries will only appear on new growth. Beautyberry can be propagated by seed, softwood cuttings, or transplanting volunteer plants.

The last photo shows Beautyberry after the leaves drop in the fall. It keeps feeding birds and wildlife long after most food sources are depleted. Those that benefit take care of seed dispersal!

Submitted by Mary Grant

Sources include USDA NRCS East Texas Plant Materials Center Fact Sheet, wildflower.org, and growingwildnursery.com