

American beautyberry

(*Callicarpa americana*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Also known as French mulberry, American beautyberry is a woody shrub found in pinelands and hammocks throughout Florida. The plant's foliage offers cover for small wildlife. Its flowers are a nectar source for butterflies and bees, while its dense clusters of berries provide food for birds and deer from late summer into winter.



Photo by Emily Bell

Flowers are small, may be pink, lavender or white and emerge from leaf axils in late spring and early summer. Leaves are ovate to elliptic and petiolate with finely toothed margins, prominent pinnate venation and a rough surface. They are oppositely arranged and are aromatic when crushed. Fruits are small ($\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter), magenta drupes that are born in dense, conspicuous clusters along the branches. Stems are square. Branches are loose and arching with grayish-brown bark.

The genus *Callicarpa* is from the Greek *calli*, meaning "beauty," and *karpos*, meaning "fruit."

The fruits are edible to humans, but have an astringent quality and not much flavor, making them somewhat unpalatable raw. Beautyberry jelly, however, is quite tasty. The leaves contain a chemical (callicarpene) that may repel mosquitoes. Gently crush the leaf and rub it against the skin to release the chemical.

Family: Lamiaceae (Mint family)

Native range: Throughout Florida

To see where natural populations of American beautyberry have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Dry to moist, well-drained sandy or calcareous soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 3–8' tall, up to 6' spread

Propagation: Cuttings, seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: North, Central, South

Garden tips: American beautyberry is known for (and easily identified by) its prolific fruit production. It is adaptable to a variety of conditions, but will flower and fruit more in full sun. The plant is generally deciduous, but may be evergreen in South Florida. Pruning in late winter is recommended to encourage denser growth.

American beautyberry is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.

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