

American Beautyberry
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With a name like American beautyberry a plant has a lot to live up to and this plant does not disappoint. While native to much of the eastern half of Texas, only the Rolling Plains, High Plains and Trans-Pecos regions do not have this shrub growing naturally, however it should grow anywhere in Texas given adequate water and care. In the High Plains it might need to be planted on the south side of a building for protection from the cold and in the Trans-Pecos regular watering should keep it happy.

While American beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*, may reach heights of 9 to 10 feet, it is more often seen as a 4 to 6-foot multi-branched shrub with light gray to reddish twigs. The new stems show stellate or star-shaped white hairs, while older growth loses the hairs. The slender stems can be either rounded or four-sided. Leaves are simple, opposite and oval while broadest in the middle and narrower at each end. These leaves are very large and noticeable being 2 to 5 inches in width, 3 to 9 inches in length with a coarse, saw-toothed margin. The upper surface of the dark green and rough-textured leaves may be smooth or have minute hairs while the lower surface is paler with stellate hairs. If you have never noticed a stellate hair pull a leaf from any species of croton and look at it under a magnifier, the hairs will be straight then at the tips they spread out into a star-burst effect. Each leaf has a petiole, or short stem, up to about 1 inch in length. Form ever follows function in that this 1-inch petiole will be where the flowers and eventual fruits spread out and develop. Flowers are pinkish-white growing from leaf axils and stack cluster after cluster up the stem. Fruits are berry clusters encircling the petioles, a bright magenta, rose or pink in color. I know of no other fruit on any plant that has these pretty magenta colors. The fruit clusters are especially noticeable in the fall after the leaves fall off. The fully ripened berries are edible and can be made into jelly. Each pulpy berry contains four tiny seeds. The empty fruit bractlets resemble deer antlers with the spreading and opposite growth.

Beautyberry is a palatable browse plant readily eaten by livestock and deer providing good browse value. The new twigs and leaves are eaten during the growing season and occasionally even into early winter. Crude protein levels of leaves and twigs run 18 percent in the spring, dropping to 8 percent in the fall. Deer, turkey, quail, songbirds and small mammals consume the ripe fruit. Pollinators will visit the flowers in the summer for nectar and pollen.

Management practices applied to rangelands can have dramatic impacts on the growth and utilization of beautyberry. Protein levels of beautyberry plants growing where cool-season prescribed burns were applied have been documented at 22 percent higher in the spring and 37 percent higher in the fall. To insure plants are able to produce seeds, rotational grazing should be practiced to ensure seeds ripen in the fall. Proper stocking rates of livestock and control of deer numbers is important to allow these low plants to survive browsing by livestock and deer. Beautyberry grows in dense to open woods on low, deep soils but can survive on dry sites although the leaves may wilt in short droughts. You can buy beautyberry in the fall at native plant sales, year-long at native plant nursery's or start plants from seeds or cuttings. If you have a spot in the yard that gets dappled shade this is the perfect plant for that area. Try American beautyberry, you will like it.

Photo captions:

1 Medium-sized American beautyberry can grow in full sun as well as dappled shade.



2 Flowers develop in axils of the leaves and stems.



3 The branching appearance of the flowers and eventual fruit clusters reveals the image of deer antlers.



4 Numerous pollinators visit the tiny nectar and pollen filled flowers.



5 Clusters of brilliant magenta colored berries form in the early fall.



6 Full sunshine reveals the beauty of beautyberry fruits



7 Large opposite leaves and numerous flower and fruit clusters makes beautyberry a valuable plant for livestock, wildlife and pollinators.

