Beautyberry

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa* spp.) is a genus of shrubs and small trees in the family Verbenaceae with numerous species native to parts of Asia, Central America and southeastern North America. *Callicarpa* means beautiful fruit, which is where the common name beautyberry comes from. Four deciduous species are used in ornamental plantings in various parts of the United States. American beautyberry (*C. americana*) is a native woodland plant in the warmer areas of the southeastern states; it is considered hardy in Zones 7-11. Three Asian species, *C. japonica* from Japan, and *C. dichotoma* and *C. bodinieri* from China, are cultivated and are considered to have more tolerance to cold (Zones 5-8).

**Mature Height/Spread**

American beautyberry and Japanese beautyberry grow 4 to 6 feet tall and wide, but can reach 8 to 10 feet under favorable growing conditions. Generally, these shrub species develop a rounded shape with long, arching branches and light green foliage. Purple beautyberry (*C. dichotoma*) is slightly smaller in stature. Leaves are smaller, and the nodes are closer together resulting in a more compact plant that is 3-5 feet in height and width.

**Growth Rate /Growing Conditions**

Beautyberries are long-lived shrubs that grow at a moderate to rapid rate depending on the species and growing conditions. Shrub size can be controlled with yearly pruning. The ideal soil is fertile, loose and well drained, although beautyberry will tolerate most soil conditions. Plants grow naturally in light to moderate shade, but can be planted in full sun for maximum flowering and berry production when adequate moisture is available. The shrubs develop a cascading or weeping effect as they mature.

**Ornamental Features**

The most appealing feature of this plant is the abundant and very showy clusters of purple or white berries produced in late summer and fall. All four species previously listed have purple berries, but cultivars are available within each species that produce white berries. Clusters of small, lavender-pink blossoms followed by clusters of green berries are produced on the new growth at each leaf axil from June through August.

The berries turn purple or white, depending on cultivar, in late August as they mature. Beautyberry is deciduous. The leaves turn pale chartreuse before dropping in the fall. Large clusters of showy, purple or white berries persist into late fall.
Callicarpa americana - Clusters of pink-lavender flowers are followed by green berries at each new leaf node throughout the summer.
James Hodges, ©2009 Clemson Extension

Callicarpa americana - Large clusters of purple berries ripen in late summer.
James Hodges, ©2009 Clemson Extension

Callicarpa americana - Colorful purple berries persist after leaf drop into late fall.
James Hodges, ©2009 Clemson Extension

Callicarpa dichotoma - White berry cultivar ‘Albifluctus’.
Karen Russ, ©2009 Clemson Extension

Callicarpa dichotoma - A mature beautyberry with a drooping form. Karen Russ, ©2009 Clemson Extension

**Landscape Use**

Because the ripe berries turn bright purple or white, plants are often used as late summer and autumn highlights or focal points in a naturalized or wildlife garden. Profuse clusters of bright metallic purple or white berries create a colorful eye-catching display similar to the way forsythia stands out in early spring as a specimen plant. Beautyberry does well in mass plantings and can be used as screening
plants, but allow ample room for the generally large and sprawling plants. Purple beautyberry (C. dichotoma) is smaller and useful in garden settings with limited growing space. Leaves turn a light yellow or chartreuse in autumn, but do not persist for any length of time. The berries persist after the leaves fall to extend the colorful berry display on bare plants well into late fall. Ripe berries are a source of food for many bird species, raccoons, opossums and small rodents, making them popular for backyard wildlife plantings.

*Callicarpa* species do reproduce from seed and new plants can be grown from seed. Young seedlings transplant easily in winter. Since the plants do reseed themselves, the Asian species are listed as potentially invasive, but there are few reports of this occurring. Named cultivars are generally reproduced from cuttings.

*Callicarpa americana* - A mockingbird surveys the large number of ripe berries. James Hodges, ©2009 Clemson Extension

**Management & Pruning**

Flowers are produced on new growth so prune in late winter or early spring. You can use either a thinning-type of pruning method or a heavy cutback to near the ground. Slower growing plants can be thinned slightly each year to provide size control and maintain a continuous arching, spreading habit. Large or fast growing plants respond well to yearly cutting back to near ground line in late winter. Severe pruning of vigorous plants grown in full sun creates large rounded shrubs with many long shoots that flower heavily and produce many purple or white fruit.

**Problems**

There are no serious insect or disease problems with beautyberry in South Carolina.

**Cultivars & Varieties**

*C. dichotoma*:
- ‘Early Amethyst’ – small purple berry
- ‘Albifuctus’ – white berries
- ‘Issai’ - mounded form, violet-blue berries
- ‘Duet’ - new beautyberry cultivar with variegated foliage and white berries

*C. japonica*:
- ‘Augustata’ – narrow leaves
- ‘Leucocarpa’ – white berries
- ‘Luxurians’ – larger than the species with large showy fruit clusters

*C. americana*:
- ‘Lactea’ – white berries and attractive foliage
- ‘Russell Montgomery’ – very attractive white berries

*C. bodinieri*:
- ‘Profusion’ - produces an abundance of violet fruit, even on young plants

*Callicarpa* hybrids:
- Purple Pearls® (‘NCCX1’, PP#26,000) – has a distinctive upright growing habit, pink flowers, violet-purple fruit, and dark purple-black foliage all season long. Grows to 4 to 5 feet tall. USDA zones 5 to 8.
- Purple Glam™ (‘NCCX2’, PPAF) – a vigorous upright growers with white flowers, purple-violet berries, and purple foliage all season long. Grows to 4 to 5 feet tall. USDA zones 5 to 8.