

Weekly MSU Extension Service column, James Shannon, MSU Extension Agent, for release September 2, 2020.

Have you ever heard of saving the best for last? American beautyberry is a native shrub that fits that bill. It starts slow but ends the growing season with an exclamation point.

The source for this article is the Mississippi State University Extension Service publication “American Beautyberry Shines in Late Summer” by Dr. Gary Bachman.

### American Beautyberry

Beautyberry is a deciduous shrub species that can be found growing along forest edges. They have alternate leaves with serrated leaf margins. The plants grow to an height of more than five feet. Beautyberry can grow reasonably well in most soil types. They can grow in areas of full sun but perform better in areas that receive protection from the hot afternoon sun.

### Finishing Strong

American beautyberry begins the year in discreet fashion. It is easily outshined by woodland and landscape flowering plants. Its early summer flowers are even nonchalant. The light pink flowers are small and nearly hidden at the base of the leaves.

As summer progresses, small green berries begin to form. When the berries turn purple in late summer, beautyberry bursts from the backseat and moves directly into the driver’s seat. The berries form bunches that surround the stems. The branches often bend toward the ground by the weight from the berries.

### Wildlife

The bright colored berries quickly draw the attention from wildlife species. They are eaten by a variety of birds including robins, cardinals, mockingbirds, brown thrashers, and others. Mammals including deer, racoons, and squirrels are also known to feast on the berries.

### Maintenance

American beautyberry is practically maintenance free. Pruning down to six inches in the early spring can make the plants more vigorous and encourage a tight growth habit. American beautyberry traditionally has had few issues with insects and disease.

There have been reports that beautyberry can be a host for crape myrtle bark scale (CMBS). This is a concern since this nonnative insect pest now has the potential to damage native plants as well as crape myrtles. CMBS has been identified in Pontotoc County and is sure to spread to other areas of the state.

### Propagation

Beautyberry can be propagated from stem cuttings or from seed. The seed can be collected from very ripe berries. The seeds should be cleaned and allowed to dry. Keep the seeds cool and dry until they can be planted in containers the following spring. Please see the MSU Extension publication “Propagating Plants for the Home Landscape” for information on using softwood cuttings to propagate beautyberry.

Prepare to be amazed as American beautyberry prepares to steal the show during the dog days of summer.

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