

Wax myrtle

Myrica cerifera

Aka Southern Waxmyrtle, Southern Bayberry



Image source: Wildflower.org

PLANTING GUIDE

Days to maturity: 360 days

Spacing: 10 ft.

Sun: Full sun to partial shade

Growing season: Perennial

OVERVIEW

Native, clumping, fast-growing shrub to small tree with small, evergreen leaves, inconspicuous flowers, and waxy gray fruit attached to twigs. Leaves and fruit smell like bayberry. Multiple, twisted trunks with smooth, light grey bark, aromatic, olive green leaves, and clusters of grey-blue, waxy berries on female plants which are attractive to wildlife are just some of the reasons Waxmyrtle is such a popular landscape plant. Most specimens form a multi-stemmed, open, rounded canopy of weak trunks and branches. This rapidly-growing, small, evergreen native tree is capable of reaching a height of 25 feet with an equal spread but is usually seen in the 10 to 20-foot range. Sometimes used as a large shrubby screen, Waxmyrtle is ideal for use as a small tree, the lower limbs removed to reveal its picturesque form. One, or several clustered together, provide pleasing dappled shade for terraces or patios.

The cultivar 'Pumila' is a dwarf form, less than three feet high. *Myrica pensylvanica*, Northern Bayberry, is a more cold-hardy species and the source of wax for bayberry candles.

BENEFITS

Tolerates periodic flooding. Natural insect repellent. Attracts birds.

GROWING & MAINTENANCE

Very tough and easily-grown, Waxmyrtle can tolerate a variety of landscape settings from full sun to partial shade, wet swamplands or high, dry and alkaline areas. Growth is thin in total shade. It is also very salt-tolerant (soil and aerosol), making it suitable for seaside applications. It is adapted to parking lots and street tree planting, especially beneath powerlines, but branches tend to droop toward the ground, possibly hindering flow of vehicular traffic if not properly trained and pruned. Set them back from the road if used as a street tree so drooping branches will not hinder traffic. Removing excess shoot growth two times each year eliminates the tall, lanky branches and reduces the tendency for branches to droop. Some landscape managers hedge the crown into a multi-stemmed dome-shaped topiary. Plants spaced 10 feet apart, maintained in this manner, can create a nice canopy of shade for pedestrian traffic.

Plants should be watered well until established and will then require no further care.

SEED COLLECTION

Propagation is by seeds, which germinate easily and rapidly, tip cuttings, division of the stolons or transplanting wild plants.

Description: Sow seed outdoors in the fall or stratify. Wax myrtle will root from softwood or semi-hardwood cuttings taken in summer. Root cuttings, 2-3 in. long., can be made in early winter.

Seed Collection: Collect fruit in September or October. Leave waxy coating on during storage, but remove it prior to sowing or stratification. Remove in a solution of 1 t. lye to 1 gal. water. Store seeds in sealed, refrigerated containers.

Seed Treatment: Stratify in moist peat 60-90 days at 34-41 degrees. Many seeds have a waxy coat that prevents water uptake and stratification. Soaking seeds in hot water or rubbing them vigorously against a rough surface will help remove the wax.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

The only drawback to the plant is its tendency to sprout from the roots. This can be a nuisance as they need to be removed several times each year to keep the tree looking sharp. However, in a naturalized garden this thick growth could be an advantage, since it would provide good nesting cover for wildlife. Only female trees produce fruit provided there is a male nearby, but seeds do not appear to become a weed problem in the landscape.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Communications, I. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/miami-dade/landscapes-gardening/shrubs--hedges-he-p/>

Plant Database. (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2021, from https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=moce2