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Native Trees and Shrubs for Maine Landscapes

Northern Bayberry

(Myrica pensylvanica)

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Go native!

This series of publications is the result of a five-year research project that evaluated the adaptability of a variety of native trees and shrubs to the stresses of urban and residential landscapes in Maine. Non-native invasive plants pose a serious threat to Maine's biodiversity. Plants such as Japanese barberry, shrubby honeysuckle, and Asiatic bittersweet, originally introduced for their ornamental features, have escaped from our landscapes, colonizing natural areas and displacing native plants and animals. By landscaping with native plants, we can create vegetation corridors that link fragmented wild areas, providing food and shelter for the native wildlife that is an integral part of our ecosystem. Your landscape choices can have an impact on the environment that goes far beyond your property lines.

Description

Form: an open, rounded shrub with multiple stems and picturesque horizontal to ascending branches

Size: 6 to 12 feet high, commonly wider than it is tall

Ornamental characteristics:

Photo by Reeser C. Manley

- glossy, dark green summer foliage; leaves aromatic when crushed
- small, rounded, waxy-coated berries, white to gray in color and very fragrant, borne in clusters along the stem beneath the branch tips



Landscape Use

Northern bayberry is a common member of Maine’s coastal plant community, sharing this harsh and often droughty habitat with native roses (*Rosa carolina*), sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*), meadowsweet (*Spiraea alba* var. *latifolia*), and staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), all intermingling in tall groundcover that is a mosaic of color and texture. Create a similar scene in your own landscape, taking advantage of this plant community’s tolerance for environmental stresses such as heat, drought, soil compaction, and salt.

In the garden, *Myrica pensylvanica* makes an excellent specimen plant or informal hedge, with the fragrant summer foliage providing a dark green background for the herbaceous or mixed border. It is also a must for the bird garden, as many winter birds eat the gray waxy-coated berries.

Remember that Northern bayberry is typically dioecious, so only female plants will bear fruit. However, you should include at least one male plant in your landscape to ensure adequate pollination.



Photo by Reeser C. Manley

Culture

Hardiness: USDA zone 4b

Soil requirements: tolerant of a wide variety of soils

Light requirements: full sun

Stress tolerances:

soil compaction—tolerant

pollution—unknown
deicing salts—tolerant
urban heat islands—tolerant
drought—tolerant
seasonal flooding—very tolerant

Insect and disease problems: infrequent



Wildlife Value

The winter fruits of bayberry are eaten by many bird species, including songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and marsh birds. They are a preferred food of chickadees, red-bellied woodpeckers, tree swallows, catbirds, bluebirds, yellow-rumped warblers, and others. Bayberry thickets also provide nesting sites for songbirds, offering excellent protection from raccoons and other nest predators.

Maintenance

Irrigation: Water shrubs regularly for at least one year after planting. Apply 1 inch of water over the root zone once a week until leaves fall in autumn: in general, a shrub's root zone extends twice as wide as its canopy. Once plants are established, further watering should not be necessary unless there are extended periods of drought.

Fertilization: Landscape trees and shrubs should not be fertilized unless a soil test indicates a need. Correct soil pH, if necessary, by amending the backfill soil. No nitrogen fertilizer should be added at planting or during the first growing season.

To learn more about native woody plants

Visit the Eastern Maine Native Plant Arboretum at University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Penobscot County office, 307 Maine Avenue in Bangor. Established in 2004, the arboretum displays 24 different native tree and shrub species that can be used in managed landscapes.

Reviewed by Cathy Neal, Extension professor, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

Photos by Reeser C. Manley.

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This series of publications and the associated research were made possible in part by the Maine Forest Service's Project Canopy.



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