

Myrica pensylvanica - Northern Bayberry (*Myricaceae*)

Myrica pensylvanica is an upright semi-evergreen shrub that often spreads by suckers to form colonies. Northern Bayberry is noted for its ornamental silver berries in winter, its winter salt spray tolerance, and its adaptability to urban stresses or wet sites.

FEATURES

Form

-medium-sized shrub



-maturing at up to 10' tall x 10' wide, but often pruned or sheared into a smaller size
-upright rounded growth habit, becoming upright spreading with age and often forming colonies by suckering

-medium growth rate

Culture

-full sun to partial shade
-extremely adaptable to heavy (clay) soils, light (sandy) soils, poor soils, dry or wet soils, soils of various pH, and winter salt spray
-propagated by seeds or rooted stem cuttings
-Bayberry Family, with no serious disease or pest problems
-commonly available in container or B&B form
-if semi-evergreen winter foliage is desired, place in a wind-sheltered site, but if nearly deciduous foliage is desired (to enhance the showy berries on female or monoecious plants), put in a more exposed site to encourage leaf abscission
-specimen plantings can gradually be limbed up into multi-trunked tree form, if desired

Foliage

-medium to dark green, alternate, obovate, and sparsely serrated on the upper half of some leaves
-semi-evergreen to deciduous in winter, with some dead brown leaves also hanging on throughout most of the winter

Flowers

-occurring in Apr. and ornamentally insignificant monoecious or dioecious; plants in the nursery industry are often selected for monoecious character so that separate male and female plants (in dioecious selections) are not required for landscape plantings

Fruits

-light green fruits in summer mature to silver or white-gray small berries in autumn and persist into the following growing season
-berries are sessile and in tight clusters along the second-year stems
-the showy ornamental berries are best displayed on plants where the foliage completely abscises from the stems in winter - either on plants genetically predisposed for complete foliage drop, or those plants



sited in exposed, windswept areas

Twigs

-green, changing to tan at the end of the first growing season, and becoming light gray to silvery on the more mature branches
-small but prominent winter floral buds are somewhat elongated

Trunk

-light gray and multi-trunked, often becoming leggy with age, but the legginess is later hidden by basal trunk and root suckers if they are not pruned away

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Function

-group or mass plantings, embankments, informal hedges, privacy screens, and at poor soil, sandy soil, wet soil, dry soil, or winter salt spray sites

Texture

-medium texture in foliage and when bare
-thick density in foliage and when bare

Assets

-winter salt spray tolerant
-very adaptable to poor, dry, compacted, or sandy soils, or to periodically wet soils
-showy silver berries in winter (on female plants or monoecious plants)
-excellent for embankments (for erosion control) or naturalized areas (where its suckering habit is not undesirable)
-foliage, stems, and berries are bayberry-scented when crushed, rubbed, or bruised

Liabilities

-often suckers from its trunk base and roots, and thereby extends its original boundaries in a slowly invasive manner (if this is desired, it is an asset)
-foliage, while semi-evergreen, often winter burns and partially remains on the shrub, and thus partially hides the showy silver berries
-legginess with maturity
-a male pollinator is needed for berry production if female plants (rather than monoecious plants) are present
-if plants are periodically sheared, less fruit production will result if the pruning is done after mid-July, by which time floral buds on the first-year wood have set for the next season

Habitat

-Zones 3 to 7
-Native to Eastern North America, primarily in northern areas along the seashore (hence its adaptation to salt spray)

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-shrubs with ornamental winter berries (*Aronia arbutifolia*, *Ilex* species, etc.) or other attractive winter features (*Cornus sericea*, *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', *Hydrangea quercifolia*, *Salix discolor*, etc.)
-salt spray tolerant shrubs (*Prunus x cistena*, *Potentilla fruticosa*, *Ribes alpinum*, etc.)
-wet-site tolerant shrubs (*Cornus sericea*, *Ilex verticillata*, *Salix purpurea*, etc.)

Cultivars – Variants – Related species

-the straight species is the most common form available