



Myrica cerifera Southern Waxmyrtle¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

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 Southern Waxmyrtle is such a popular landscape plant (Fig. 1). 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, Southern 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.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Myrica cerifera*

Pronunciation: MEER-ih-kuh ser-IF-er-uh

Common name(s): Southern Waxmyrtle, Southern Bayberry

Family: *Myricaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a

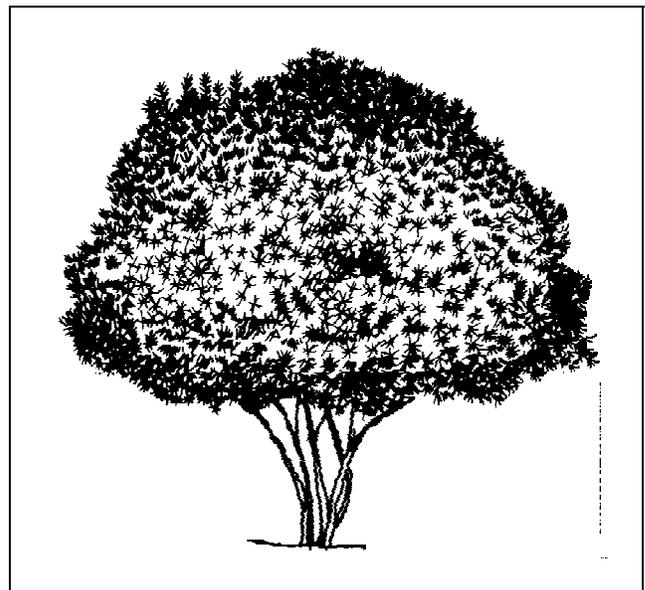


Figure 1. Middle-aged Southern Waxmyrtle.

standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 20 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire; serrate

Leaf shape: oblong; oblanceolate; spatulate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen; fragrant

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: blue

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: brown; gray

Current year twig thickness: thin



Figure 3. Foliage of Southern Waxmyrtle.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline;
extended flooding; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Very tough and easily-grown, Southern 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 lot

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. 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.

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.

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

Pests

Caterpillars and mites may occasionally attack the foliage. Webworms common in some landscapes - prune to remove infestation.

Diseases

Cankers may form on old branches and trunks and kill them. Also, a lethal wilt disease caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Fusarium* spp. has been recently noted attacking Waxmyrtle plants in central and south Florida. The vascular tissue is irregularly stained purple but not decayed as a result of the disease. Root injury and nitrogen fertilization encourage the disease.