



Myrica pensylvanica Northern Bayberry¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This shrub is hardy into USDA hardiness zone 2 and reaches a height and spread of six to eight feet (Fig. 1). The glossy green foliage is followed by persistent, silvery gray berries on female plants that provide winter interest. 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 Bayberry 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, Bayberry 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 pensylvanica*

Pronunciation: MEER-ih-kuh pen-sill-VAN-ih-kuh

Common name(s): Northern Bayberry

Family: *Myricaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 3 through 7A (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near

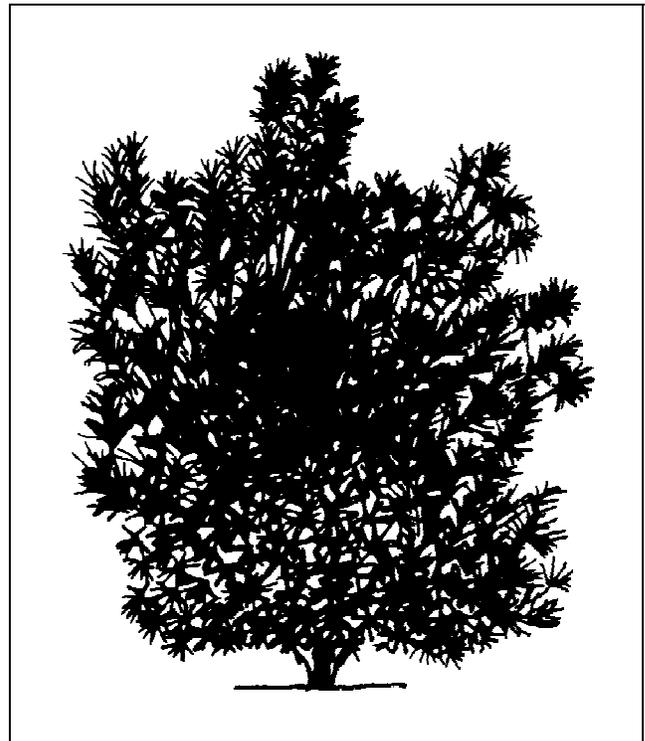


Figure 1. Young Northern Bayberry.

a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; trainable as a standard; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 6 to 12 feet
Spread: 6 to 10 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; serrate
Leaf shape: oblong; oblanceolate; obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous; fragrant; semievergreen
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: white
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

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

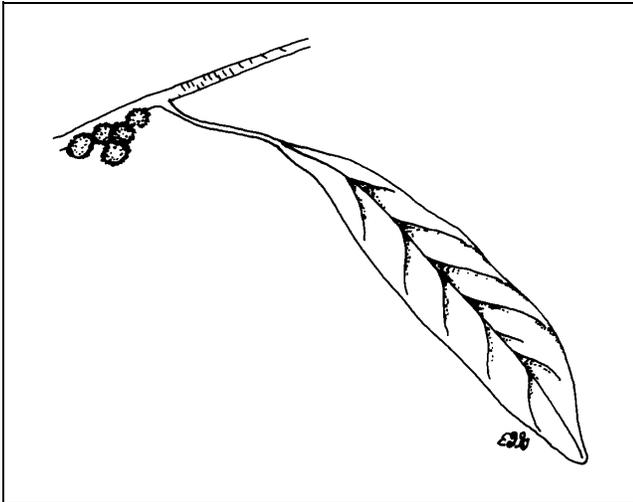


Figure 3. Foliage of Northern Bayberry.

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

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; extended flooding; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerance: good

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

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, Bayberry 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.

Bayberry 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 pruned. Set them back from the road if used as a street tree so drooping branches will not hinder traffic. Heading the top back 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 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 but seeds do not germinate in the landscape.

Pests and Diseases

There are no serious diseases or pests of this tree.