

Beautyberry

(*Callicarpa americana*)

Lamiaceae

Beautyberry is a deciduous shrub that is native to the southeastern United States and grows from Maryland west to Tennessee and south to Florida and Texas. It grows in full sun to part shade, often along the edges of forests in the understory. It grows up to 12 feet tall with arching branches that bear small, pink flowers in dense clusters at the base of the leaves from early to mid-summer. Following the flowers are the bright, purple fruits that ripen in the fall and remain on the plant into the winter, providing an important food source for many species of birds. The genus name comes from the Greeks and means beautiful fruit.

Beautyberry offers more than just beautiful berries. A traditional folk remedy was known and used by the country people in Mississippi to offer relief from biting insects. They would cut the branches with the leaves attached, crush the leaves, and then place the branches between the harness and the horse to keep biting flies and mosquitoes away.

Beautyberry's reputation as an insect repellent got the attention of the USDA-ARS in 2004 and initiated the investigation of the plant's potential use as a natural insect repellent. Scientific research studies over a 12-month period identified callicarpinal, intermedeol, and spathulenol as naturally occurring chemicals that repelled insects.

Bringing the repellent to the market place for mass consumption is a bit of a challenge. It must first be registered with the Environmental Protection Agency and can be quite costly. Toxicity levels and evaporation rates must also be determined.



Meanwhile, beautyberry is finding value in the landscape to attract birds and as a screen in wet or wooded locations. It requires little maintenance and is relatively free of diseases and pests.

References

Pons, Luis. (February, 2006). "Learning from our elders: Folk remedy yields mosquito-thwarting compound." *Agriculture Research*. Retrieved from <https://agresearchmag.ars.usda.gov/2006/feb/mosquito>.

University Of Mississippi. "Scientists Confirm Folk Remedy Repels Mosquitoes." *ScienceDaily*, 3 July 2006. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/07/060703091932.htm.