



The Potting Bench



Welcome to this month's installment of "The Potting Bench"! For our North Florida suburban yards, finding a shrub that offers brilliant color, supports local wildlife, and thrives in our climate with minimal fuss can feel like striking gold. This month, we are spotlighting the **American Beautyberry** (*Callicarpa americana*), a native shrub beloved for its striking clusters of iridescent purple, pink, or white berries that hug the branches from late summer well into winter. While it can grow to be a large, flowing shrub in the wild, the American Beautyberry can easily be managed as a compact, show-stopping focal point or border hedge for your landscape.

Here is your guide to sourcing, transplanting, and maintaining the American Beautyberry:

Sourcing Your Beautyberry

What to Look For: You can find these shrubs at local independent garden centers, often sold in one- to three-gallon pots. Be sure to check the plant tag for the botanical name *Callicarpa americana* to ensure you are getting the true native species, as Asian cultivars are frequently sold under the generic "Beautyberry" name.

Color Varieties

While the classic deep purple is stunning, you can also

look for unique native selections like *Callicarpa americana* var. *lactea* for pure white berries, or 'Welch's Pink' for lovely light pink fruit.

Free Plants: If a neighbor already has one, they are incredibly easy to propagate by digging up natural volunteers, growing from seed, or taking softwood cuttings in the spring.

Transplanting and Placement

Light and Spacing: Beautyberries are highly adaptable, but planting them in a spot that receives full sun will reward you with a denser, more compact shrub and heavier berry production. If placed in the shade, they tend to grow leggier and more open. Be sure to give each plant about 4 to 6 feet of space to flourish.

Soil: This hardy native isn't fussy—it tolerates sandy, loamy, and even heavy clay soils, though it prefers well-drained conditions.

When and How to Plant

The optimal time to transplant is during the late fall, winter, or early spring while the plant is dormant, allowing the root system to establish before the harsh summer heat arrives. Dig a hole twice the width of the root ball, ensure the plant is level with the ground, and water generously to settle the soil and minimize transplant shock.

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Bench Courtesy the Stevensons



application of a balanced fertilizer in early spring is sufficient, but never fertilize in the fall or winter.

Pruning for a Compact Shape

Because the American Beautyberry produces its flowers and berries on new growth, it responds beautifully to hard pruning. To maintain a manageable size and encourage a dense, bushy habit packed with berries, you can cut the shrub back to 6 to 12 inches above the ground each winter.

Happy planting, and enjoy the spectacular burst of color and the songbirds your new American Beautyberry will surely attract!

Ongoing Maintenance

Watering: During its first year, keep the soil consistently moist so the roots can properly establish.

Once established, the beautyberry is impressively drought-tolerant. Its leaves may wilt early during a dry spell, but it bounces back remarkably quickly once watered.

Feeding

This plant thrives on a bit of neglect! It is best not to fertilize it, as excess nutrients can actually cause floppy, leggy growth. If your soil is exceedingly poor, a light



- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

