

Green Garden News

American Beautyberry

The American beautyberry, *Calli-
carpa americana*, is showing its fall
berry color in natural areas and yards
all over the Southeast. This is one of
those “taken-for-granted” native
shrub species that should be used
and appreciated more in landscapes.

It’s easy to identify at this time of
year. Just look around the edge of
wooded areas for a shrub with large
leaves and purple berry clusters
along the stems.

Though
beautyberry is
planted mostly
for its ornamen-
tal value, this is
an excellent wild-
life plant. It is an
important food
source for birds
and small mam-
mals. Over ten
species of birds
feed on the fruit.



These include
bobwhite quail, brown thrashers, car-
dinals, woodpeckers, mockingbirds
and purple finches. The fruit is also
eaten by the raccoon, opossum and
gray fox.

The habit of growth of this plant
species provides cover for many ani-
mals. All parts also contain surpris-
ingly high nutrient levels for brows-
ers. The leaves have been found to

contain over 21 percent protein in
April, with twigs having over 15 per-
cent. Even in November the bare
twigs were found to contain over 4
percent protein.

Beautyberry at a Glance

- Classification: Verbenaceae family – closely related to Lantana, Verbena and Chaste-tree.
- Identification: A shrub that grows to 8 feet in height with deciduous, op-

posite foliage. The leaves are coarse to the touch. Small, lilac colored blossoms cluster around stems during spring. The flowers are followed by purple fruits during autumn. There is a cultivar that bears white berries and other colors might

be available in the future.

- Light and Soil Requirement: Broken shade or filtered sunlight is ideal, but it will grow under a wide range of light conditions. Fertile soil is best, but light sands are tolerated, once well established.
- Salt tolerance: None, even periodic salt spray could cause damage.

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September Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Annuals to plant include coleus and salvia.
- Pinch or deadhead and re-fertilize flowering annual beds in order to keep them productive.
- Prepare perennial beds for planting next month. September is one of the best times to establish perennials in our area, especially those that are started from divisions such as liriopse, mondo and daylilies.
- Do all that you can to increase air circulation between plants so that the foliage and stems can dry off between rain showers. This helps to decrease the possibility of fungal diseases such as leaf and stem blights.

Trees and Shrubs

- Watch for azalea defoliator caterpillars on azaleas. These are the large, black caterpillars that can strip foliage and weaken plants very quickly. Control them by hand picking or with an approved insecticide.
- Check shrubs weekly in order to head off insect or disease problems.
- White webbing that covers the branches and trunks of trees is from a group of insects called the psocids (tree cattle). These insects do not injure trees but feed on surface debris.
- Finish any major pruning on hydrangeas and gardenias.



Fruits and Nuts

- Last call for major pruning of blueberries.

Vegetable Garden

- The warm-season vegetables that can be planted outdoors include pole beans, lima beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, southern peas, peppers, pumpkins, summer squash, winter squash, tomatoes and watermelon.
- Some fall planted warm-season vegetables are subject to more severe pest problems than spring planted crops. More intensive pest control measures will be required.
- The cool-season vegetables that can be planted include broccoli, cauliflower, collards, bunching onions, and turnips.

Lawns

- Watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns, mole crickets and sod webworms.
- To help reduce stress on the grass as temperatures rise, raise the lawn mowing height by ½ to 1 inch.
- September is typically the last month to fertilize your lawn.

Insect of the Month

Have citrus leaves that are curled and have brown squiggly lines running through them? Notice leaves that have a silvery film over the brown lines and rolled leaf edges?

The above symptoms are caused by the citrus leaf-miner and are the result of the moth's larva mining out material just below the leaf surface. It starts with a very small moth that lays an egg on the underside of a leaf. Once the egg hatches, the larvae immediately enters the leaf and begins feeding. They go back and forth across the leaf making a serpentine (snake-like) shape as they tunnel beneath the leaf surface. The mines get larger as the leafminer develops. At the end of the larval stage it goes to the edge of the leaf and curls the leaf edge to form a cocoon.

Citrus leafminer can occur on new, tender growth flushes throughout the growing season, but it normally does not affect the first spring flush. For mature trees, citrus leafminer is usually just a case of the tree not looking perfect. It does not usually affect tree growth or fruit yield. However, young trees can be damaged by leafminer because of the frequent new growth flushes which can be attacked.

Because leafminers are inside the leaf, sprays do NOT kill them. If leafminers have been a problem in the past you can spray a horticultural oil. Spray only when new growth is present. Wait two weeks to spray again. This will help to keep the moth from laying her egg on the leaf and will provide some limited protection. Remember to spray late in the evening so as not to burn the plant with the oil (never spray a citrus tree with oil if it is under drought stress). Females also lay their eggs in the evening and at night, so that is the best timing for a spray. Use summer grade oil such as ultra-fine or superior oils. Be sure to read and follow the label directions.



New Weapon in the Fight Against Mole Crickets

After a quarter-century fight against three invasive insects from South America, University of Florida researchers are declaring victory against the pests that cause \$94 million in damage to turf and pastures each year.

The successful battle against mole crickets is a prime example of how biological control agents can be used to manage pests without conventional pesticides, said Howard Frank, a professor of entomology at UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

He said the release of three beneficial organisms — wasps, nematodes and flies imported from South America that attack mole crickets — has reduced mole cricket populations in the Gainesville area by 95 percent, and the control is spreading throughout Florida.

"Reductions increased during the past 12 years as populations of the introduced natural enemies increased and began to have a spectacular effect on the mole cricket pests," said Frank, who has coordinated the mole cricket research program since 1985.

Frank said four species of mole crickets are found in Florida: northern, short-winged, southern and tawny.

The northern mole cricket, which is indigenous to the state, is not closely related to the three South American invaders, and it is not troublesome because native wasp and nematode species in Florida keep it under control. Unfortunately, the three invasive mole cricket species are not affected by native wasps and nematodes in Florida, he said.

Accidentally introduced to the southeastern United States more than 75 years ago, the pest mole crickets first became a problem for Florida vegetable growers and were poorly controlled with arsenic baits. The invasive pests became a nuisance again in the 1970s when the Environmental Protection Agency banned chlordane and similar pesticides.

"When the three invasive mole crickets left their natural enemies behind, there was nothing to stop their population boom here," Frank said. "These pest mole crickets, which tunnel into the ground and feed on plant roots, are now found from North Carolina to Texas, and they continue to spread north and west."

He said the pest crickets have a real affinity for bahiagrass, Florida's most common pasture grass, which covers more than 2.5 million of the state's 35 million acres. Like the pest crickets, bahiagrass was imported from South America, and it provides the in-

sects with an almost endless food source. They also eat Bermudagrass on Florida golf courses.

"Early research on the three invasive pests showed how mole crickets, like moles, burrow into soil around plant roots and prevent them from absorbing water," Frank said. "We also realized that permanent control of these pests could only be achieved with a classical biological control program, and we began looking for natural enemies in South America."

A BENEFICIAL WASP

In Brazil, researchers found a native wasp (*Larra bicolor*) that attacks the pest mole crickets. After the Brazilian wasp stings the pest mole cricket and lays an egg, the wasp grub (larva) begins feeding on the mole cricket and kills it within two weeks.

In 1981-1983, the Brazilian wasp was released at several South Florida locations, but it did not thrive and failed to provide effective control of the pest mole crickets.

Undaunted, UF researchers found a tougher strain of the same wasp in the higher elevations of Bolivia, releasing it in the Gainesville area during 1988 and 1989. It attacks all three pest mole cricket species, but does not threaten Florida's native northern mole cricket.



"By late 1993, it was evident that the Bolivian strain of the wasp had become established," Frank said. "Four years later, the population had spread at least 20 miles east and west of Gainesville. By 2002, it seems to have spread 135 miles northwest and perhaps as far south. In time, it is likely to occupy all of Florida."

—UF/IFAS News Release, 6/15/2006

Editor's Note: The *Larra bicolor* wasp appeared in Santa Rosa County following Hurricane Ivan. To invite and keep this wasp in your landscape, it's helpful to provide its nectar food—the false shrubby buttonwood plant.

For more information and to receive a free nectar plant, attend the Extension Service's Harvest Happenings on October 14, 2006 from 8 am to noon. See Upcoming Events for more information.

Upcoming Events

Every Monday: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday at the Extension Office located at 6263 Dogwood Drive, Milton.

Every Tuesday: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy.

September 22, 2006: *Forest Stewardship Workshop: Tree/Plant Identification for Forestland Owners.* This program will give landowners an opportunity to learn to identify some of the common tree, shrub and herbaceous species on their forest properties. We'll focus on a representative sample of species that grow in Northwest Florida and some time will also be spent on identifying the most problem invasive exotic plants such as cogongrass, Japanese climbing fern, and tropical soda apple. Samples of flowers, twigs, leaves, and/or fruits will be used to teach identification.

Space is limited, please call 850-675-6654 to preregister.

October 14, 2006: *Harvest Happenings Fall Festival.* The UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension Staff and the Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners are hosting the second annual Harvest Happenings Fall Festival as part of the Beaches to Woodlands Tour in Santa Rosa County.

The festival will be held from 8 a.m. to noon at the Santa Rosa County Extension Office located at 6263 Dogwood Drive, Milton, FL.

This year, the Extension Service will be highlighting several important topics including:

- **Mole Cricket Control:** Tired of applying chemicals year after year to control pest mole crickets. If so, help is here in the form of a solitary wasp. The *Larra bicolor* wasp is a biological control for mole crickets. The wasp finds a mole cricket and temporarily paralyzes it and then de-

posits an egg on its underside. After the larva hatches from the egg, it feeds externally on the mole cricket and eventually kills it. The wasp, native to South America, was due to be released in Santa Rosa County in 2005. It appeared on its own following local hurricanes. In order to attract and keep this beneficial insect in your yard, you need to plant its favorite plant--a wildflower called false shrubby buttonweed. The Extension Service will be providing FREE buttonweed plants to those attending Harvest Happenings— as long as supplies last.

- **Tours of the Extension Teaching and Demonstration Gardens:** Take a tour of the onsite gardens and find out what attracts birds to the landscape, how to grow vegetables in a small space, what ornamental grasses are all about and what tropical plants grow best in Northwest Florida.

- **Diagnostic Center:** Having problems with your soil, lawn or plants? The Master Gardeners will be providing FREE soil pH testing, salt testing of irrigation wells and will be available to help you with your plant problems.

Instructions on how to collect an appropriate specimen are located on our website at <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension/diagnostics.html>.

- **Daffodils for Florida:** Learn which of these spring beauties will grow in our zone 8 climate and how to care for them. The Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners will be offering zone appropriate bulbs for sale.

- **Landscaping for Wildlife:** Learn how to create a wildlife-friendly backyard habitat. Information on backyard certification will be available.

- **Wildflowers for North Florida:** Fall is a great time to plant wildflowers. Learn which ones do best here and how to plant and care for them. Sample packs of seeds will be available.

For additional information, call 850-623-3868.



For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.

(850) 623-3868

Questions and Answers

Q: I'd like to grow garlic. Is it possible in Northwest Florida?

A: Home grown garlic is not only a possibility; this is one of the most trouble free plants grown in the vegetable or herb garden. It is grown as a winter crop here, so the potential garlic grower should be preparing to plant soon.

There are two different kinds of garlic grown locally. The standard garlic, *Allium sativum*, is similar to onion, except rather than producing a single large bulb, it produces a compound bulb containing scales or cloves. During its vegetative stage, the narrow and flat leaves reach a height of 12 inches.

Elephant garlic is another type that is popular in many local gardens. Botanically it is *Allium ampeloprasum*, and is closely related to leek. This form of garlic produces very large bulbs that may weigh a pound or more. These huge bulbs consist of enlarged cloves that are milder than those of regular garlic. Some people eat them raw.

The plant is quite large, but otherwise resembles ordinary garlic. It flowers rapidly in the spring, forming a round composite flower head at the top of a seed stalk. This flowering habit gives elephant garlic a second name - greathheaded garlic.

Garlic Growing Tips:

- Garlic is best planted during early fall in Gulf Coast gardens. Young plants withstand cold, and there is little danger of freezing.
- Starts, in the form of cloves, are available through seed company catalogues. Local garden suppliers might have a supply, and friends and neighbors who grow garlic often enjoy sharing.
- Set the cloves, pointed end up, about two inches deep in a well prepared bed. A spacing of 6 to 12 inches is suggested, depending upon the soil. A closer spacing can be used in a bed that is well amended/conditioned.
- Plants emerge from the soil six to eight weeks after the cloves are planted. Fertilize lightly during mid and late winter, and water as needed to keep the soil moist.
- Bulbing begins during the spring, after the tops have reached full size. Harvesting is usually done in late April or early May in our area.
- Garlic must be well dried and cured before

storing. This can be done outdoors if no rain occurs, or indoors in a dry shed.

- Once dried, separate the cloves, setting some aside for the next planting. Standard garlic cloves used for propagation should be refrigerated until the next planting season.
- Those saved for eating store well for several months in a well ventilated, dry building.
- There is little mention of specific varieties of elephant garlic, but there are several standard garlic varieties. These include: 'Creole', 'Italian', 'Tahiti', 'California Late' and 'California Early'. Of these, 'Creole' is suggested for trials in the South. 'Italian' is a purple type, with cloves protruding in a cluster at the stem base.

Q: Is it too early to prune my crapemyrtles?

A: Yes, avoid heavy pruning during early fall. Branch removal at this time of year could stimulate a late flush of growth which would be susceptible to the first freeze.

You can tidy up plants if you wish, by clipping off old flower spikes. Cut an inch or two below each. Crapemyrtles generally do not require heavy pruning. If any is needed, delay the job until late winter.

Q: Can I make my own sugar solution for my artificial hummingbird feeder?

A: You can prepare your own solution with 1 part white, granulated, cane sugar to 4 parts water. Boil the sugar solution to help dissolve the sugar. Then allow it to cool before filling a feeder. This concentration is about the same as that in wildflower nectar. Using a sweeter solution, sugar substitutes or honey could be lethal to hummers. It also is not necessary to add red food coloring. The birds will be attracted to the red feeders.



American Beautyberry

(Continued from page 1)

- Availability: Though not commonly available, it can be found. Check nurseries and garden centers that specialize in, or offer native plants.
- Propagation – Plants can be reproduced by planting the seed or by rooting semi-hardwood cuttings during the summer.

Note: The clusters of berry-like fruit of beautyberry discussed here are not actually berries. Technically, they are drupes. Though not important to most gardeners and others who admire this plant species, such misnomers are not appreciated by some botanists and taxonomists.



—by Dan Mullins, Commercial Horticulture Agent, UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension



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