

Purple Beautyberry

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator

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As flowering plants give way to autumn, it's the fruit that many produce that add interest to our landscapes. It's hard to beat the berries produced by purple beautyberry, *Callicarpa dichotoma*. At a time of the year when fruits highlight the reds, yellows and golds of autumn, it's nice to see the show-stopping lustrous purple-violet fruits of beautyberry. The fruits are small, just 1/8 of an inch across, but the numerous clusters along the stem make it a standout.

Beautyberry should not be confused with beautybush, which is an entirely different plant with a whole other set of flowering and fruiting characteristics.

Purple beautyberry is a shrub, reaching just 36 inches or so in height. The plant is wider than it is tall, easily spreading to 42 inches across. In our climate, beautyberry acts more like a sub-shrub, meaning the crown and larger branches survive the winter but the twigs and smaller branches do not. No worries! Even if your beautyberry does not have any winter dieback, cutting back stems to 6 inches in the spring gives rise to more of the small pink flowers (and hence more purple-violet fruits). This hard pruning also results in more compact, less rangy plants.

Sources list purple beautyberry as hardy to USDA Zones 5-8, but I've been growing it in my Zone 4 garden for years now and it keeps looking better every year. The literature lists best fruit production when two or more are planted, providing pollen for one another. This is also debatable, since my lone shrub produces LOTS of fruits every year. The fruit show lasts September through October and provides food for many songbirds.

Plant purple beautyberry in a loamy soil with good drainage. A location that receives 3-6 hours of sunlight daily means that beautyberry can be planted in those challenging locations that don't receive direct sunlight all day. Water during dry spells as the plant will drop fruits during prolonged dry weather. Purple beautyberry's smaller form makes it a great addition to perennial gardens and front entrance plantings.

Give purple beautyberry a try for its showy display of fall fruits.

For the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I'm horticulture educator Kathleen Cue