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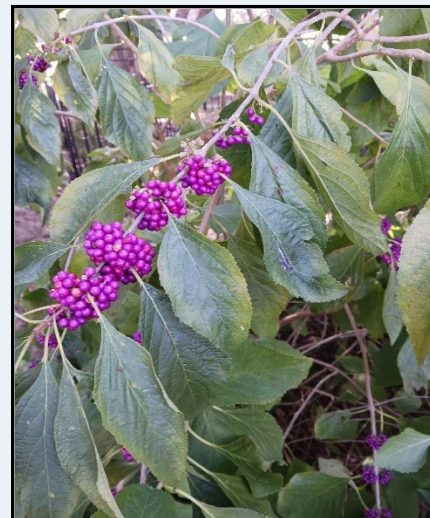
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The Beauty is in the Berry

Debbie Clark, SRCMGV

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a deciduous native shrub (Zones 6-10) that truly lives up to its name. It puts on its show in the late summer/early fall in northwest Florida, sporting brilliant amethyst berries. It initially “blooms” small pinkish flowers before the show-stopper berries appear. The berries last for about 3-4 weeks and birds, especially mockingbirds, love feasting on them. It is rarely browsed by deer.



Beautyberry branch

Photo: Debbie Clark

This is a large shrub topping out at 6-8 feet tall and wide. Its size can be mitigated by heavy pruning after its berries fade and leaves fall in mid fall to late winter. Since it blooms on new wood, these shrubs can be pruned by as much as 2/3 or more causing little stress to the plant and not impacting the next year's berry production.

This shrub thrives in a woodland setting in full sun with some afternoon shade. It requires very little care. Well-draining soil is recommended. I have never fertilized my 4 year old plants and they still thrive. Although it is a very drought tolerant plant, it may need to be watered during prolonged drought periods.



The berries themselves are edible and slightly sweet, but not particularly tasty. While I have never made it myself, beautyberry jam, however, is quite flavorful. You can find several recipes for it online.

There are several cultivars of this gorgeous shrub including:

'Bok Tower': This shrub has white berries.

'Welch's Pink': This shrub has pink berries.

My plants have produced several volunteer seedlings that I have transplanted in other areas of my yard. It is also easily propagated with soft wood cuttings:

- Collect a 6-7 inch cutting in late spring. Remove the lower leaves.
 - Dip in rooting hormone and plant in moist potting mix.
 - A clear plastic bag over the container helps retain moisture.
 - Place the container in bright, indirect light.
 - Keep the soil evenly moist but never soggy.
- Once you see foliage growth in 3-4 weeks, you'll know roots have formed.

It can also be propagated by seed but takes longer.

There are 2-3 seeds inside each berry.

I highly recommend growing this beauty, and it never fails to generate interest and compliments.

Try it yourself!



Beautyberry shrub

Photo: Debbie Clark



Cabbages and Cold Weather

Lois Scott, SRCMGV

Plants that are in the cabbage family can take the cold. It is not cold yet, but it will be.

These cabbages were photographed at the Milton Extension office demonstration garden. In December 2022 there were three days in a row that dipped down into the teens. This shows how suited cabbages are for our NW Florida winters. Consider planting some now, as an edible or as an ornamental.

Photos: Frances Andrews SRCMGV



The Basics of Seed Saving

Ellie Mascara, SRCMGV

Are you happy with your garden this year? If so, you might want to consider reproducing it again next year. Not only will you know exactly what you will produce, but you will also save on the cost of new seeds. If you are a beginner, you might be under the impression that seed saving is difficult. It is not. To be successful, there are three basic areas that need to be considered. These areas include choosing the right plants, harvesting correctly, and storing appropriately.

Here are some tips for choosing the right plant. First, choose open-pollinated plants. This means that the plant is naturally pollinated by the wind or insects. Heirlooms would be a good choice because they are open-pollinated and have been passed down from generation to generation. They will produce the same characteristics as the parent plant.

Hybrids on the other hand, will not produce the same characteristics as the parent plant. You never know for sure what you will get when a seed has been hybridized.

Beginners should start with annual plants. If you choose biennials you must wait until their second year for the plants to produce flowers and ultimately seeds.

Tomatoes, peppers, beans, and peas are the best choices because they are self-pollinating. Self-pollinating plants do not need to receive pollen from another plant because they have both male and female organs.

After you have planted your open-pollinated garden, your next step will be to select the healthiest plants for harvesting. Do not save seeds from weak plants. Vegetable seeds should remain on the plant until the plant is completely dry. When harvesting seeds remember that fruit maturity usually occurs before seed maturity. Therefore, let the vegetables remain on the plant until they are completely dry.

Here are some specific tips for harvesting seeds from plants.

Tomato seeds:

When the fruit is completely ripe scoop out the seeds and gelatinous substance surrounding them. Place seeds and gel in a glass container with some water. Stir the mixture at least two times a day. As the mixture ferments, the seeds will fall to the bottom. Continue this procedure for five days. Pour off the liquid. Rinse the seeds and spread them out to dry on a paper towel. When the seeds are dry, they are ready for storage.

Pepper:

Allow the targeted peppers to remain on the plant until they are completely ripe and beginning to wrinkle. Cut open the peppers and spread the seeds on a paper towel to dry. They are now ready for storage.



Photo: Shua-Lanzarini, unsplash

Peas and beans:

Allow the pods to remain on the vine until they are wrinkled and brown. The seeds will rattle inside the pod. Remove the pods and spread them out to dry. This process usually takes about two weeks. When the seeds are completely dry, they are ready to be shelled and stored.

Seeds should be stored in a tightly sealed glass container. To keep them moisture free, place a silica gel packet in the container. The seeds should be kept in a cool, dry place. The refrigerator is ideal. Each container should be labeled with their name, variety, and date.

By following these tips, you will be on the road to becoming a successful seed saver.

For more information on this topic refer to [The Seed Garden: The Art and Practice of Seed Saving](#), published by the Seed Saver Exchange.

Purple Muhly Grass *Muhlenbergia capillaris*



photo: Zen Rial, Getty Images

When you see muhly grass in bloom, you know that fall has fully arrived. The cloud of light, airy, pinkish-rose blooms glow when lit from behind by the afternoon sun. The wispy mass of pink moves with the slightest breeze putting on quite a show! This is one reason so many gardeners are planting this ornamental grass.

Other reasons for its popularity are its neat clumping nature, growing 3 to 4 feet tall and about as wide. Muhly grass is a tough native grass useful in many different landscape sites. It has extreme tolerance to drought and flooding, making it suited for wetland sites as well as beach front landscapes. It would be hard to find a more adaptable grass.

Muhly grass makes a nice, fine-textured mass planting for sites ranging from roadside to residential landscape. Plant them in large, sweeping drifts on a large landscape for a dramatic effect. It is virtually maintenance free except in those instances where you might want to remove the brown foliage in the spring by cutting the clump

back to the ground before new growth emerges. February is a good time to do this trimming.

Growth is best in sandy or rocky soil. It is native to pine flatwoods, coastal upland and beach dunes, and sand hill communities.

Purple Muhly Grass at a Glance:

- Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay
- Drought tolerance: high
- Soil salt tolerances: moderate
- Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches
- Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form,
- Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Recourse:

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/muhly-grass.html>



Photo: Jerry Hopman, istock

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. joshua.criss@ufl.edu



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