

Bayberry

(*Myrica spp.*)

Bayberry, one of many members of the genus *Myrica*, is found in the southeastern US. However, when you combine Bayberry with other *Myrica* species (including Sweet Fern, Wax Myrtle, California Wax Myrtle, Waxberry, Firetree and Sierra Bayberry) it is obvious that the entire eastern half of the US, gulf coast and the lower Pacific coast states all have *Myrica* plant forms present. While waxy coating of the fruit berries is used for the familiar bayberry scented candles, the stems and leaves of Bayberry are also aromatic when broken or crushed.

Myrica plants are typically shrubs, with most plants not exceeding 10 feet tall (although the southern Wax Myrtle can reach 40 feet). Plants close to the coast tend to be smaller. They do quite well in poor soil, tolerate salt water spray well, and also are used frequently as hedges.

Bayberry can flower as early as February in the southern climes, and as late as the end of May further north. The pollen is produced on flowers that are drooping catkins. Bayberry produces large amounts of pollen, which is dispersed by wind. The pollen is considered a moderate to severe allergen, causing allergic rhinitis and allergic conjunctivitis. Studies have confirmed the value of diagnosing Bayberry-allergic patients with skin testing.

