

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION, ECOLOGICAL SCIENCE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

NOTICE OF RELEASE OF 'WILDWOOD' BAYBERRY

The United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service announce the naming and release of 'Wildwood' bayberry (Myrica pensylvanica Loisel.)

'Wildwood' bayberry (Myrica pensylvanica Loisel.) originates from a cross of four superior strains that were selected from an assembly of 86 total accessions. These four strains were selected for their exceptional seedling vigor, survival rate, foliage abundance, high level of insect and disease resistance, leaf retention, cold tolerance and growth rate. They have been field tested on coastal sand dune sites from Delaware to Massachusetts with little or no performance variation from that of the parent plant. While the species M. pensylvanica is commonly found growing within USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 3b-8b, the cultivar Wildwood is presently being recommended for use within zones 5a-8b.

The states of origin of these four superior strains that composes the genetic make up of Wildwood bayberry are New Jersey and North Carolina.

Description

Wildwood bayberry is an erect shrub with exceptionally good tolerance to salt spray. On coastal sand dunes, it will probably not exceed 1.8 m in height, while inland it will grow to heights of up to 2.4 m. Wildwood is a crooked multi-stemmed shrub with dark green foliage; leaves are alternate, simple, serrated, elliptic-obovate, and about 3.8 cm long.

Both leaves and fruit of Wildwood bayberry have a distinct appealing aroma; oils can be extracted from both to scent candles, potpourris, etc. Its waxy gray-white clusters of fruit (actually nutlets) are 3.5-4.5 mm in diameter and develop from inconspicuous flowers which bloom in early spring from second year stems. Male and female catkins are produced by separate plants, but the fruit only forms on the female plants. The fruit will remain attached to the stem well into the winter.

Once this shrub has become established, it will slowly spread vegetatively by rhizomes as well as viable seeds, forming dense thickets. The root system has nitrogen bearing nodules attached to it which aid in the plants development by synthesizing nitrogen for the plant to utilize; this characteristic helps Wildwood survive in stressed environments such as coastal sand dunes.

Conservation Use

When combined with pioneering type dune grasses (American beachgrass, coastal panicgrass, sea oats, bitter panicgrass, etc.), Wildwood bayberry can provide permanent back dune stabilization. Since bayberry can be considered one of the top wind and storm resistant native shrubs found growing along the east coast, an improved cultivar such as Wildwood has great promise in developing a durable permanent vegetative barrier to protect coastal communities.

Many of the characteristics possessed by Wildwood make it an essential and versatile plant for aiding the stabilizing of coastal sand dunes. Wildwood is well adapted to a wide range of sandy textured soils, but is less vigorous on heavy soils. Once established, its rhizomatous root system will quickly form dense and vigorous stands.

Although originally developed to protect coastal communities, Wildwood is not limited to its niche on the sand dunes. This cultivar has excellent late winter leaf and fruit retention; a noteworthy asset when utilized by land managers in wildlife plots. The retained foliage offers good protective and escape cover, while the fruit provide winter food to birds and mammals even with snow cover since the fruit are produced well off the ground. There are approximately thirty-five songbirds which will eat the fruit of Wildwood along with bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, wild turkey, and ringneck pheasants.

In agricultural applications, Wildwood has the potential to be utilized as a medium sized windbreak and as field borders. Along public roads and highways, this plant can be utilized to form green corridors while providing good erosion control cover. When planted in residential areas, Wildwood will provide privacy screens, a medium textured landscape background, a dark green hedge that tolerates moderate trimming, and backyard wildlife cover.

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During establishment, the plant spacing utilized for Wildwood is based on its intended use. On sand dunes, these shrubs should be planted 1.2 m to 1.8 m apart to provide a dense barrier to protect coastal communities. When bayberry is utilized in

wildlife food and cover plots, a 1.8 m to 2.4 m spacing would be ideal. If bayberry is used for a non-critical area hedge or field border, the 1.8 m spacing works well.

Foundation seed and plants will be produced by the Soil Conservation Service at the Cape May Plant Materials Center, 1536 Route 9 North, Cape May Court House, New Jersey 08210. Foundation seed will be available to commercial nurseries in January 1993.

All programs and services of the USDA Soil Conservation Service are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, or handicap.

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Date

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