USDA NRCS
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Natural Resources Conservation Service

Plant Fact Sheet

DWARF WAX MYRTLE

Myrica pusilla Raf.

Plant Symbol = MYPU

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Kika de la Garza Plant Materials Center

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Alternate Names
Myrica cerifera, southern bayberry

Uses
Wildlife: The fruits of the wax myrtles (*Myrica pusilla*) provide a good source of food for wild birds. It is believed that the waxy coating may help prevent the fruit from drying out in arid climates and may help to keep water-borne fruits afloat in wetter ones. The branches can also provide good nesting and perching habitat for birds.

Restoration: Dwarf wax myrtle is a good plant to use for native area restoration on sandy coastal and woodland sites. Its ability to fix nitrogen in the soil and spread by stolons makes it particularly desirable. It is a good plant to use in dune stabilization and restoration. On clayey sites, common wax myrtle may be a better choice.

Ornamental: Dwarf wax myrtle also has ornamental value. Its evergreen habit and aromatic leaves make it an interesting landscape plant. In addition, wax from the fruit of the wax myrtles can be used to make wax for candles.

Status
Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description
Dwarf wax myrtle is a small, evergreen, shrub that grows in colonies. A member of the wax myrtle or bayberry (Myricaceae) family, it can grow to 6 feet in height, and is stoloniferous. Dwarf wax myrtle is dioecious, having male and female flowers on separate plants. They bloom in March and April in Texas, but April to June in cooler climates.

Members of the wax myrtle family have resinous dots on their leaves and the leaves are aromatic. In addition, they have nodules on their roots that help fix nitrogen in the soil. Plants in this family produce fruits with a waxy coating.

Adaptation
Dwarf wax myrtle can be found from Delaware to Florida, and west to Texas and Arkansas. In Texas, it is found in the eastern portion of the state from the piney woods of northeastern Texas, to the oak woodlands of southern and southeastern Texas. Dwarf wax myrtle prefers sandy coastal soils and will tolerate wet or dry conditions. Nokes (1986) notes that it can adapt to heavier soils, and has been grown successfully in Dallas. Dwarf wax myrtle has moderate salinity tolerance.

A close relative of dwarf wax myrtle is common wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*). Common wax myrtle grows from 10-30 feet tall, is not stoloniferous, and is the only evergreen wax myrtle with wedge shaped leaves. It is usually found in clay soils near streams, lakes, and other waterways, as well as in boggy grasslands and wet wooded areas.

It appears that some of the literature combines *Myrica pusilla* and *Myrica cerifera* under the species *cerifera.* Be sure to carefully read information to determine which species is actually being discussed. We found only three plant manual authors that actually made the distinction: Correll and Johnston (1996), Nokes (1986), and Petrides (1986).

Known Distribution
Consult the PLANTS database for this species current distribution.

Establishment
Dwarf wax myrtle is best reproduced from seed. Germination is best if the waxy seed coat is removed prior to seeding or stratification (Nokes, 1986). The wax can be removed by hand rubbing (USDA-NRCS & USDI-NPS, 1993) or by soaking the seeds in a mixture of one teaspoon of lye to one gallon of water (Nokes, 1986). However, it is best to leave the wax on until you are ready to use the seed as it increases storage viability (USDA-NRCS & USDI-NPS, 1993).

The seeds of the wax myrtle have a dormant embryo and require a period of cold, moist stratification. This can be accomplished by sowing outdoors in cooler weather or stratifying in moist peat for 60-90 days at 34º to 41º F (Nokes, 1986). At the Center, the seeds took as much as three months to germinate, so be patient.

A germination study conducted at the Center in the fall of 1999 yielded an average germination of 40% after 90 days. Conditions in the chamber were 12 hours of dark at 10º C and 12 hours of light at 20º C. Seeds were hand rubbed to remove the wax prior to being placed in the chamber. No other treatments were used. Seeds began germinating in about a month, and germination continued through the end of the study.

There are approximately 84,000 seeds per pound. Late fall or early winter seeding and a seeding rate of 3 grams per square foot are recommended.

Nokes (1986) notes that the wax myrtles can be propagated from soft and semi-hardwood cuttings treated with a rooting hormone. We did not have good success with this method at the Plant Materials Center, and therefore do not recommend it.

Transplants can be made bare-root in the wintertime, or balled and burlap plants can be transplanted in the warmer months if the location is shady and the soil is kept moist. At the Kika de la Garza Center, small plants have been successfully transplanted from cone-tainers in early spring. Use of a rooting hormone is recommended with bare-root plantings. The use of plastic plant shelters is beneficial to protect young plants from heavy browsing, reduce plant competition, and create a friendlier microclimate until the young plants can get established.

Management
Dwarf wax myrtle requires little management once established. At the Plant Materials Center, dwarf wax myrtle is neither irrigated nor fertilized. Stutzenbaker (1999) reports wax myrtle to be durable, able to withstand periodic burning, flooding, drought, and heavy grazing by livestock. For ornamental purposes, Nokes (1986) recommends pruning dead limbs in the spring to produce bushy growth.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site<http://plants.usda.gov> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>