

PACIFIC WAXMYRTLE

Morella californica (Cham. & Schlecht.) Wilbur
plant symbol = MOCA6

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center



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Alternative Names

California bayberry, California wax myrtle, bayberry, pacific bayberry, western bayberry, *Myrica californica* (MYCA13)

Uses

Ethnobotanic: Wax from the pulp of the fruit was used to make aromatic candles. The wax was also used in making soups. A gray-brown and a maroon-purple dye was obtained from the fresh or dried berries (Grae 1974). This species was easily grown and valued especially on the Pacific Coast for its berries and evergreen leaves (Wyman 1965).

Agroforestry: *Myrica californica* is used in tree strips for windbreaks. They are planted and managed to protect livestock, enhance production, and control soil erosion. Windbreaks can help communities with harsh winter conditions better handle the impact of winter storms and reduce home heating costs during the winter months. They also provide shade and wind protection during the summer, which aids in the reduction of cooling bills.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Pacific waxmyrtle (*Myrica californica*) is a large evergreen shrub or small tree, ten to thirty-five feet high. The leaves are alternate, simple, five to ten centimeters long with resin dots, and are slightly sticky and fragrant when crushed. The fruit are purplish, single seeded berries, coated with a white wax, ripening in the early autumn and usually falling during the winter. The bark is smooth, compact, dark gray or light brown on the surface and dark red-brown internally (Sargent 1961).

Distribution: Pacific waxmyrtle occurs in canyons and hill slopes of the coastal region from the Santa Monica Mountains of Los Angeles County northward to Del Norte County, and north to Washington (McMinn 1939). For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation

Myrica californica thrives in wet soil conditions and is drought tolerant. It grows best in full sun in an open position and can tolerate light shaded areas. This species prefers a peaty soil or lime free loamy soil.

Establishment

Propagation from Seed: Seeds are best sown as soon as ripe in the autumn in a cold frame. Stored seeds will germinate faster if they go through a three-month period of cold stratification and then are sown in a cold frame. As soon as the seeds are ripe, place them in seed trays or containers. When seedlings are large enough to handle, place them in individual pots and grow them in a cold frame for the first winter. Plants should be planted into their permanent positions in the late spring or early summer.

Management

In exposed situations, the wax myrtle forms a little more than a bushy arborescent shrub but in protected areas it becomes a medium sized tree, much branched and densely leafy, with a gray warty unfissured bark (Howell 1949). Plants injured by fire sprout from the heavy root crown (Ibid.).

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Available through native plant nurseries within its range.

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Prepared By:

Jammie Favorite

formerly USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Species Coordinator

M. Kat Anderson

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, c/o Environmental Horticulture Dept., Davis, California

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