

Myrica cerifera

[Synonyms : *Cerophora lanceolata*, *Cerotheramnus arborescens*, *Cerotheramnus ceriferus*, *Cerotheramnus pumilus*, *Morella cerifera*, *Myrica caroliniensis*, *Myrica cerifera* var. *angustifolia*, *Myrica cerifera* var. *arborescens*, *Myrica cerifera* var. *dubia*, *Myrica cerifera* var. *pumila*, *Myrica cortex*, *Myrica mexicana*, *Myrica pumila*, *Myrica pusilla*, *Myrica xalapensis*]

BAYBERRY is an evergreen (occasionally deciduous or semi-deciduous) shrub or tree. Native to eastern United States (especially from New Jersey to Florida) it has scaly yellowish catkins.

It is also known as *Albero della cera* (Italian), American vegetable tallow, American vegetable wax, *Arbre à la cire* (French), *Arbre à suif* (French), Bayberry tallow, Bayberry wax tree, Bearing myrica, Candleberry, Candleberry myrtle, *Cirier* (French), *Darshishaan* (Persian), *Kandula* (Persian), *Kataphala* (Indian), Louisiana waxtree, *Mom ag* (Turkish), *Mortella cerifera* (Italian), Myrica, Myrtle, Prairie myrtle, *Pianta della cera* (Italian), Southern bayberry, Southern wax myrtle, Swamp myrtle, Sweet myrtle, Tallow shrub, Vegetable tallow, *Vřesna voskonosná* (Czech), *Vřesna vosková* (Slovak), *Wachsgagel* (German), *Wachsmyrte* (German), Waxberry, Wax myrtle, and Waxtree; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of discipline, and instruction.

The thick, edible yellow or light green wax coating the berry, which is known as Myrica wax or Bayberry tallow and is harder and more brittle than beeswax, is removed from the fruit in boiling water. About 4 lb. of fruit yields about 1 lb. wax.

Warning – large doses can cause vomiting and/or flatulence.

Cerifera is derived from Greek *cero-* (wax, horn) and Latin *-fer* (bearing, carrying) components meaning ‘wax-bearing’.

North American Seminole Indians made a washing liquid from the plant. They also used the plant as an alternative to tobacco.

Early North American settlers removed the wax from the fruit in boiling water (as for instance the Houma Indians had long done) and made it into candles (as well as using it for scented soap), a practice which still continues today. The candles will burn with a distinctive bluish light.

Dried powdered bark is sometimes an ingredient in perfume sachets that are placed between clothing.

A few North American tribes valued the plant’s medicinal qualities. According to records it was a cure for headaches for the Micmac and Seminole Indians, it was taken to ease fever by the Seminole and Choctaw tribes, and the Seminole and Koasati (especially the children of the latter) had it prescribed for stomach upsets. Choctaw Indians gargled with it to ease tonsillitis, the Micmac used it as a stimulant and to treat rheumatism, and it was a Houma remedy for worms.

The wax is used now in the manufacture of both soap and candles. It also provides a commercial ingredient in a hair preparation called ‘Bay Rum’.

Medicinally, it is said that the wax was first used in Europe in 1722. It has been recommended for the treatment of dysentery. The root bark however has seen greater use – as a snuff to treat nasal catarrh, an ingredient in poultices for skin ulcers, and internally as a remedy

for diarrhoea, jaundice and other disorders. Today bayberry offers a commercial ingredient in some proprietary cold cures.