Northern Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

by Nancy Stephenson, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

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This plant is an interesting shrub that I also identified close to the James River. It is a deciduous, fast-growing native that will reach 6-15 feet tall within 5 years. Its glossy green leaves are a key identification feature, especially since the flowers bloom before the leaves appear in March. The shrub produces aromatic fruit and foliage, which can help you recognize it even when not flowering.

You will typically find this shrub in a partially shaded area with moist, rich, well-drained soil. It thrives in woodlands and along streams, making it suitable for shaded garden beds or naturalized areas. The shrub has no serious problems, but ensuring proper soil and light conditions will promote healthy growth.

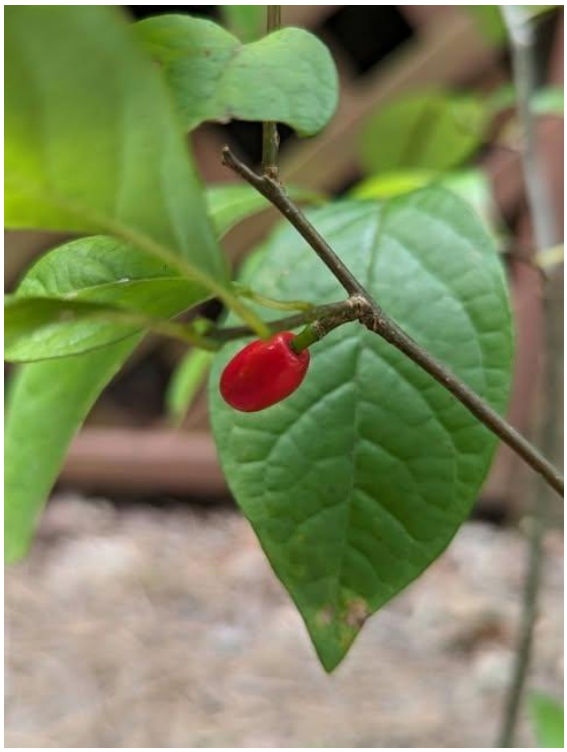


Photo by Hope Duckworth

Collect seeds in late summer through October, when the fruit has turned red. Properly cleaning and storing seeds in moist sand, or sowing directly into the soil, can make your planting experience successful and rewarding.

Some benefits of this shrub include making tea and creating a spice that combines the flavors of allspice, nutmeg, and black pepper, encouraging readers to explore its culinary potential.

This shrub is a host for the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Spicebush Swallowtail, and Promethea Moth. Recognizing its role in supporting local wildlife can foster ecological connection and pride among readers.

References:

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Penn State University Extension Service