

Fayatree (firetree)

Morella faya (Aiton) Wilbur
[formerly *Myrica faya*; see note below]

Bayberry family (waxmyrtle family) (Myricaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

Evergreen introduced shrub or small tree, with many narrowly elliptical leaves, twigs and leaf surfaces with brown or yellow dot scales visible under a lens, and many dark red to blackish fruits more than ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter. Shrub or small tree to 40 feet (12 m) high and 10 inches (25 cm) in trunk diameter. Bark brown to gray, smooth or becoming slightly fissured, inner bark greenish yellow, bitter. Twigs greenish, angled, with raised half-round leaf scars.

Leaves many, crowded, alternate, hairless, thin, narrowly elliptical, 1¼–4½ inches (3–11 cm) long, ⅜–¾ inch (1–2 cm) wide, short-pointed at apex, widest beyond middle, tapering to base and slender leafstalk about ¼ inch (6 mm) long, edges slightly turned down and often wavy toothed, above slightly shiny dark green, beneath dull green with veins slightly raised.

Flower clusters (spikes) at leaf bases, ½–1¼ inches (1.3–3 cm) long, unbranched. Flowers many, stalkless, minute, male and female on same plant (monoecious), without calyx or corolla, each above a scale. Male flowers ⅜ inch (5 mm) long, with four pinkish tinged stamens. Female flowers often joined together in groups of three above a scale.

Fruits (drupes) many, stalkless along slender unbranched axes ¾–2¼ inches (2–6 cm) mostly back of leaves, round, more than ¼ inch (6 mm) in diameter, turning from greenish to dark red to blackish; the surface with many tiny round beadlike scales, flesh reddish, almost tasteless. Seed single, brown, rounded, more than ⅛ inch (3 mm) diameter.

Introduced into Hawaii as an ornamental probably by Portuguese settlers, who made wine from the fruits, and now naturalized in moist areas throughout the islands. It is especially common in the pasture land above the town of Paauilo on the Hamakua Coast of Hawaii. Also present and spreading at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and on the fringes of the Alakai Swamp, Kauai, where it was planted in 1927 and again in 1940. Almost all plantings were made by the Division of Forestry in 1926 and 1927. Since 1940, it has been considered one of Hawaii's most noxious plants. A nitrogen fixer, it has

the ability to take over the best pasture land by forming dense thickets. An active eradication program is underway but is a continuing struggle with the present system of poisoning and uprooting.

Special areas

Kokee, Volcanoes

Range

Native of Azores and Canary Islands

Other common names

[Note to the CTAHR reprint: The common name fayatree is currently preferred to firetree, fayabush, and firebush because “fire” is probably a corruption of “faya” and because the plant is a tree rather than a bush. Since the original publication of this book, which gave this plant's name as firetree, the scientific name, *Myrica faya*, also has been revised; it is now *Morella faya* (Aiton) Wilbur.]



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Twig with male flowers (upper left) and twig with fruits, 1 X.