

African Lantern Bush

Lamprosia azurea



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Description

The African Lantern Bush (*L. azurea*) is a perennial shrub that reaches 6-10 ft in height and width. It has simple, opposite leaves (1-2 in long) that are dark green with finely serrated edges and a rough texture. Small blue pollinator-attracting flowers bloom in clusters from May to June. Post-flowering, it produces bright blue, bead-like fruits that persist through winter. The shrub reproduces sexually via seeds and vegetatively through root suckers. Seeds are small and black, ripening in late summer to fall, and are dispersed by birds and wildlife. It has a lifespan of 10-15 years.

Background

Native to semi-arid shrublands and woodlands of Africa, the shrub was introduced to North America in the early 21st century for its vibrant blue flowers. It is likely to become increasingly available for decorative hedges due to its ornamental appeal and drought resistance.

It thrives in open fields and is adaptable to poor and compacted soils. It can grow in full sun to partial shade and is tolerant of salt. The shrub does well in dry to moderately dry conditions, favoring areas with some level of disturbance.

Ecological Impact

The African Lantern Bush's ability to thrive in disturbed conditions makes it a valuable species for providing habitat in degraded environments. While birds eat the fruit, one study in its introduced range suggested that the berry's low fat and nutrient content could lead to poor nutrition in overwintering birds.