October Report on Callicarpa americana

I cut this branch of Tamarix to talk about today because the committee discussed putting a bush in our PHS exhibit, but not many members were familiar with it. It is in it’s second bloom of the season, which is quite unusual. When I looked it up to check on it’s growing requirements, I discovered that it’s an invasive species, so it should not be planted in the landscape. That being said, no self-seeded Tamarix have sprouted in my yard, unlike a lot of plants I grow! Instead, I want to recommend Callicarpa americana, a native species. This fast growing bush can reach seven feet high, with an equal width. It is tolerant of shade, but will do better in sun. The pretty purple berries will look good for months, if not eaten by the deer and birds. The tender branch tips being nibbled on by deer will only make it bushier, so don’t hesitate to prune it in the spring. Besides being food for birds, it’s low spreading habit provides good shelter for them. Callicarpa is also an insect repelling plant; an extract from the leaves repels ants and mosquitos. There is a cultivar with white berries, which is a standout in the shade garden. I’ve only seen it once, but Ann has just purchased one at Groff’s plant farm, so it is available locally.