



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum opulus L. americanum*)

Plant Family: Caprifoliaceae

Wetland Indicator Status:

- FAC (GP & MW)
- FACW (NCNE)



Highbush Cranberry is a common shrub in moist habitats

Few shrubs have been planted more often for wildlife and conservation plantings than Highbush Cranberry. The species is adaptable to a wide range of soil and moisture conditions and it has attractive foliage, flowers and fruit. It also provides many important functions in the landscape such as providing nesting habitat and cover for wildlife, a nectar and pollen source for pollinators, a wind break along roadways, and an effective soil stabilizer along streambanks and buffers. The species has an edible fruit that can be used for making jellies and pies and it is eaten by wildlife species during the winter months.



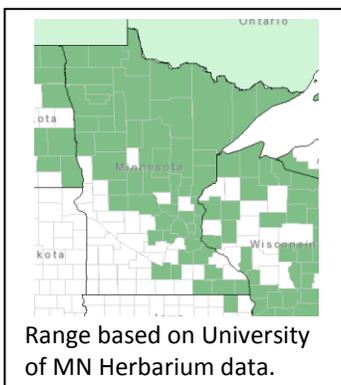
Highbush Cranberry blooming in spring

Identification

American highbush cranberry has light reddish brown coloring on young twigs that becomes scaly and gray over time. Its buds are large and reddish in color. Leaf color changes from green in spring to bright red in autumn. The leaves are opposite, simple, have three lobes and have coarsely serrated edges. The base of each leaf has one to six small glands on a reddish brown stalk. Individual leaves are two to four inches long and wide. In late to early spring, white flowers appear in clusters. The outer blooms are sterile with five petals about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch across. Inner blooms are fertile with five white spreading petals that last about three to four weeks. In late summer or early fall these blooms are replaced by bright red, one-seeded drupes about $\frac{1}{3}$ inch in diameter that can last into mid to late winter.



Bright red drupes appearing in late summer or early fall.



Range

The American Highbush Cranberry thrives in moist but well drained environments and can be found in the majority of Minnesota in woodland borders, streambanks, swamps, thickets, forested bogs and roadside ditches. It is also part of many moist habitats across the North and Eastern United States. Being tolerant of a wide range of pH values, the species can successfully grow in well-drained and poorly-drained soils.

Uses

Viburnum opulus L. americanum is a useful species for erosion control, as a windbreak and to provide screening and cover for small mammals and birds with its dense branching. Twigs and buds provide food for deer, moose and beaver in winter months and are a staple for ruffed grouse. Pheasants and songbirds also eat the fruit and the nectar and pollen attract small bees (like Halictid and Andrenid bees), Syrphid flies and beetles. As a landscaping feature, the American Highbush Cranberry bush is valued for its flowers and bright red fruits which provide winter color. Medicinally it is used as an antispasmodic to alleviate cramping and asthma.

Primary Uses:

- Edible
- Habitat
- Ornamental
- Erosion Control

Planting Recommendations

Highbush Cranberry is available as bare-root and containerized plants. When planted in favorable soil conditions seedlings can grow to full size in five to ten years. It is important to suppress weeds as seedlings become established. Highbush Cranberry seed can take a couple years to germinate in the wild. To speed up germination seed can be collected in the fall and stored at 60 degrees F for 5 months and then germinated in a greenhouse or cold frame.

Planting Methods

- Bare root
- Container



Highbush Cranberry foliage cover

Similar Species

Nearly identical to American High Bush Cranberry, Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus var. opulus*) is a commonly planted European species that can hybridize with American High Bush Cranberry. The species look very similar but there are generally differences in glands where the leaf stalk meets the leaf. The glands on Guelder rose tend to be short and cup shaped while those on American High Bush Cranberry tend to be relatively tall and flat or rounded (like an upside down bowl). Hybridization between the two can make identification challenging.



Leaves and flowers of Guelder-rose, image by Katy Chayka, Minnesota Wildflowers



Glands of Guelder-rose, image by Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

References

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/shrub/american-highbush-cranberry>

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/am_cranbush.html

USDA Plants Database: http://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_viopa2.pdf

Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden:

<http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/highbushcranberry.html>