



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)

Plant Family: Rose

Wetland Indicator Status:
Midwest – Facultative
Wetland
Great Plains – Obligate
N.Cent N.East - Facultative



A cluster of white flowers with five petals (Photo by Dave Hanson)

The only species of *Aronia* native to Minnesota, black chokeberry is quite small in size and lacks thorns. The natural color from the berry is used in the food industry and is also made into jellies and fruit drinks. The plant is grown extensively in Europe though it is native to North America. It supports a number of pollinators and is valued in landscaping for its three seasons of color with white and pink flowers in the spring, green leaves in the summer, and bright yellows, oranges, and reds in the fall.



Dark blue berries that are high in antioxidants (Photo by Dave Hanson)

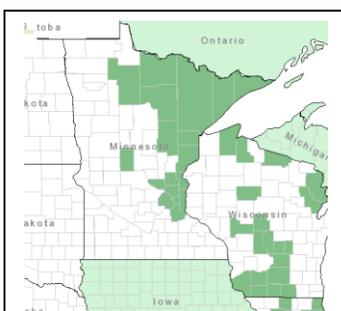
Identification

This small shrub species grows from three to eight feet tall and is often bushy in appearance. The twigs are reddish and smooth with scattered white pores. The older bark tends to turn gray and become rough. The leaves are alternate and have shapes varying from round to urn-shaped. They are a medium green with serrated edges and are hairless with a pale green lower surface. The leaves turn a dark glossy green as the season progresses. The flowers have five white or pinkish rounded petals and each flower cluster has between seven and eighteen flowers on branching stalks. In late summer each flower is replaced by a purplish-black berry. In the fall, the deciduous leaves become yellow, orange or red.



The shrubs relatively compact form makes it popular for home landscaping (Photo by Dave Hanson)

Range



Range based on University of MN Herbarium data.

Black chokeberry is native to the Great Lakes region and the Northeastern United States. Its range extends as far south as the higher elevations of the Appalachian Mountains and is occasionally found in sandy areas of Northeastern Illinois. The species occurs most often in moist woods, prairies, and in drier thickets on bluffs and cliffs. In wooded areas, occasional wildfires are beneficial to black chokeberry because it reduces competition from taller canopy trees. This shrub also invades mesic sand prairies and can create its own 'shrub prairie'. Black chokeberry grows well in full sunlight and is moderately tolerant of shade.

Uses

This deciduous, cold-hardy shrub is useful in landscape plantings as it is adaptable to a variety of soil conditions and has few disease and pest problems. The low growing aspect of the shrub makes it ideal for border planting and is often used along roadsides, highways, and parking lots for this purpose. The nectar and pollen of the flowers attract a number of pollinators including native bees and the leaves support insects such as caterpillars and moths. Some birds eat the berries such as the Ruffed Grouse and the berries also attract mammals such as black bears, fox, and squirrels. The twigs and foliage are browsed by rabbits and white-tailed deer to a limited extent. The berry is used in juice and wine production in Eastern Europe and was introduced to the European continent from North America. Berry consumption is becoming more prevalent in the form of canning and jelly making because the antioxidant qualities of black chokeberry make it beneficial to the human diet.

Primary Uses:

- Landscape Planting
- Human Consumption
- Pollinator Habitat



Attractive fall color (Photo by Dave Hanson)

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Cuttings
- Containerized plants

Black chokeberry plants can establish from seeds, cuttings, or containerized plants. Seeds should be harvested from the berries in the fall and should be cleaned. The best germination occurs from seeds that have been cleaned as poor germination often results from seeds that have not been separated from the pulp. Seeds should be dried before storage and planting and should be sown in the fall. Seeds need about 12-13 weeks of

cold stratification for germination. Cuttings should occur in March-April (prior to leaf emergence) and cuttings should be inserted into moist soil. Establishment from cuttings will be most successful when the cuttings are from half-ripe wood and cut one half inch below a node. Control of invading weeds and grasses is important for establishing black chokeberry plants and a thinning of older stems is recommended every few years.

Similar Species



Glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*) has similar leaves and stems but it has small greenish white flowers clustered in leaf axils and can grow up to 20 feet tall.



Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) also has similar leaves and stems but has drooping cylindrical clusters of white flowers and can reach over 30 feet tall.

References

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/bl_chokeberry.htm

USDA Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=ARME6>

Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden: <http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/blackchokeberry.html>