

Guide to the Berries of the Northwest Territories

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Illustrations by: Lesley A. Singer

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Introduction

This guide arose from a research project called Indigenous Knowledge of Berries in the Northwest Territories. This project was designed to document Indigenous knowledge of berries throughout the Northwest Territories, with an aim to understanding the status of berries in the region – what we know and don't know about them, where they grow, trends, and possible threats. The work was guided by an advisory committee of knowledge holders from across the Northwest Territories, along with researchers and support staff. The advisory committee included Alestine Andre, Annie Buckle, Lila Fraser Erasmus, Elaine Lamalice, Margaret Leishman, Beatrice Lepine, Margaret McDonald, Celine Proctor, and Anne Thrasher. It built upon a foundation of collaboration and partnership, and involved numerous partners, including co-management agencies, renewable resource councils, hunters and trappers' committees, Indigenous and territorial governments, affiliated agencies, and academia. The results of this research, which took place between 2023 and 2025 across the Northwest Territories, will provide a strong baseline against which future changes in berry species can be measured.

As our team embarked on this research, it became clear that people used a variety of names for berries. Thus, the research team used pictures to make sure we were all talking about the same species, even if the words we were using were different. The research team brought in a broad idea and framework for this guide and knowledge holders from across the territory built its content; adding local names, descriptions, and uses for each of the berries. This guide would not have been possible without their generous contributions.




“I’m really happy to be doing this interview and because you always hear interviews about caribou and moose like that and nothing for berries, and berries are plants too, they’re important food for everyone. It’s a good source of food. And good to get out and enjoy the country, mingle with other people. It’s best thing you could do in life, with your time...”

— Knowledge Holder, Fort McPherson, 2023



What is a Berry?

For the purposes of this guide, the term ‘berries’ refers to **any plant bearing parts that have the appearance of, and are picked like, berries**. This includes ‘true’ berries, but also **accessory fruits, pomes, aggregate fruits, and cones**. Botanically, a berry refers only to the kind of fleshy fruit produced by a plant that has seeds rather than a pit and is produced from just one flower that contains one ovary. This includes, for example, currants, bearberries, bilberries, blueberries, cranberries, and crowberries, but not strawberries, raspberries, or juniper berries. **Accessory fruits** like strawberries have an edible part (i.e., the fruit) that develops from a part other than the ovary of the flower. In strawberries, the small, visible ‘seeds’ are, botanically, the ‘fruit’, while the red part we think of as the fruit comes from the receptacle of the flower. **Pomes** (e.g., saskatoons, rosehips in the Northwest Territories (NWT)); apples are a more typical example although not occurring in the NWT) have a tough inner core that is easily distinguishable from the fleshier fruit that surrounds it. **Aggregate fruits** (e.g., raspberries) have small ‘fruitlets’ joined together to form a single ‘fruit’. Juniper ‘berries’ are actually female **cones**, where the scales of the cone have merged to resemble a berry (Crang et al., 2018; Sept, 2018).



“As a kid, cranberries was the big one. Like you know, wherever we went around the north, there was always cranberries. And I loved them ever since I was a child, so any chance to fill my mouth with cranberries was taken. As an older adult being in the bush full time, we pick a little bit more. We do mooseberries or the highbush cranberries. And, those I saw in there that strawberry blite. We had to pick that too. And, oh yeah, cloudberrries too. Yeah, we pick up, up north, cloudberrries.”

— Chloe Dragon-Smith, Fort Chipewyan, 2023



The Berries

There are a lot of plants that have berries in the Northwest Territories! Some of these are the easily recognizable ones we're all excited to harvest each year, like cranberries and cloudberrries (Section 1 – Commonly Harvested Berries). But there are others that are less obvious, or don't produce as many berries, that are included here too (Section 2 – Other Edible Berries). There are also a few poisonous berries in the region that we've included for good measure, so you know which ones are definitely not safe to eat (Section 3 – Poisonous Berries). However, sometimes identification will not be certain.

We advise strongly against eating anything that you cannot identify with certainty.

An animal eating a berry or plant is not a reliable indicator that the fruit or plant is safe for people to eat. Allergic reactions are possible even when a fruit or plant isn't poisonous.

Culinary and medicinal uses are included for interest only; this does not represent medical advice nor a recommendation on treatment. Please exercise caution.

Few participants in our research currently use berries medicinally, although many expressed an interest in using berries in this manner. Some noted that traditional medicinal botanical knowledge is increasingly difficult to access.

The full list of berries included in this guide (see the Table of Contents) is listed with English common and scientific names (Brouillet et al., 2010+). Additional names, descriptions, and uses for each plant are included on the plant's identification page. Species names, descriptions, and uses were informed by VASCAN (Brouillet et al., 2010+), Indigenous knowledge holders, Sept (2018), ARI (n.d.), Trelawney (1988), Milburn (2002), Cody (1996), Porsild & Cody (1980), Andre & Fehr (2002), the Flora of North America (1993), Dogrib Divisional Board of Education (1996), the Tłıchǫ Online Dictionary (2024), Kudlak & Compton (2018), Lowe (1984), Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2014a, b), and Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre (2021). Some berries in this guide may have additional common names, in various languages, that are not reflected in the text. The names included in the pages that follow are not intended to be exhaustive but instead represent the names knowledge holders we spoke to used during interviews and validation sessions, in addition to those in other published guides. Spellings have evolved over time and vary among sources; as such, the names used in this text may sometimes differ from those in other texts.



“Berries was depended on for something sweet in the summer. Everyone picked berries and stored them. Berries was a big part of our diet. Women used to pick berries. They used to make birch bark containers and in this they used to pick berries. Then they used to store them and some berries they used to fry it up, then they would keep this for the winter. There’s nothing that is more tastier than meat and berries that we eat in the winter.”

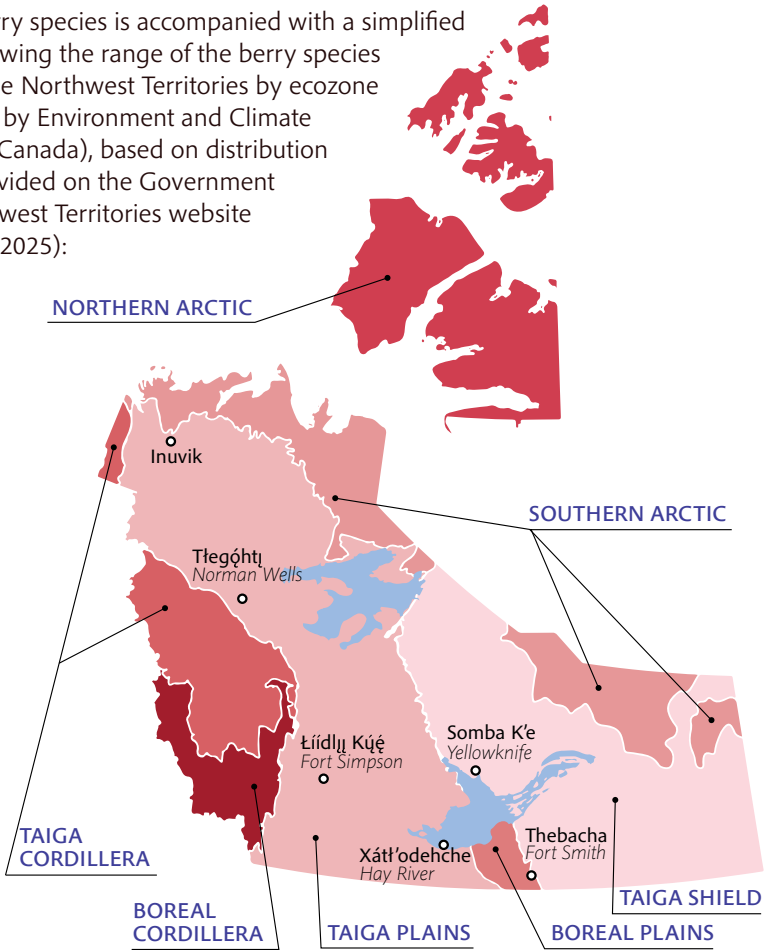
— Marka Bullock, Elders’ biographies, 1999



Using this Guide

Range Maps

Each berry species is accompanied with a simplified map showing the range of the berry species across the Northwest Territories by ecozone (defined by Environment and Climate Change Canada), based on distribution data provided on the Government of Northwest Territories website (GNWT 2025):



Icons

Each berry species is accompanied with icons indicating the following:



Medicinal



Edible



**Edible
(With Caution)**



**Poisonous
(Berry)**



**Poisonous
(Other Parts)**

Respectful Harvesting Practices

Take care of the land and the land will take care of you.



An offering to the land should be left when harvesting berries and plants. This could include tobacco, tea, a prayer, or similar.



Respect each other as well as the berries and plants.



Gathering berries regularly ensures they will always be there for generations to come.

Depending on the community, **ask for permission** if you're gathering in a family or community's traditional harvesting area. Consult or go with Elders in your community if you are new to harvesting.



Share your harvest.



Avoid over-harvesting and don't remove all berries from an area. When you are going to use a plant, **only take what is needed**.

Pick only when ripe to avoid damaging the plant while picking.





Commonly Harvested Berries



Black Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*)



Other names: Dineech'ùh, Gwichya Gwich'in; dineech'uh, Teet'it Gwich'in; tsqht'è, Tłı̨chǫ Yatı̨; kablaq, Sallirmiutun; paunraq, Uummarmiutun; paun'ngaq, Kangiryuarmiutun; ezhahi jié, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatı̨; crakeberry, curlewberry, heathberry, northern crowberry, blackberry, crowberry (although note that this name is more typically used for alpine bearberries in the Gwich'in Settlement Area), mossberry.

Identification and habitat: Common, small shrub that grows close to the ground in patches in moist, shaded areas and acidic soils, often alongside moss, or in rocky areas. The plant spreads belowground via runners. Leaves are evergreen and needle-like in appearance. There's a deep groove on the underside of each of these leaves. Flowers are red to dark purple and tiny, growing in the join where the leaf meets the stem. The fruit is black, shiny, round, and sweet. Pick berries after the first frost for added sweetness.



Indigenous knowledge holders have described crowberries growing all over the bush and in the same general places as cranberries, but the best crowberries may be found in somewhat more open areas where there are shrubs and in rocky, spruce-associated areas. Crowberries are ready for picking around the same time as cranberries (late fall/early winter).

Uses: Edible. In some areas of the north, this fruit is considered incredibly important for subsistence. Traditionally used in it'suh and as a dye for fish scales, hides, and quills. Also makes excellent jam, puddings, and bannock. Medicinally, various combinations of the berries, roots, and stems, sometimes with other plants as well, have been used to treat colds, stomach aches, mouth infections, menstrual pain, childbirth pain, and rashes. Berries are known to be eaten by geese, ptarmigan, sandhill cranes, and bears.



Black Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*)
Photo Credit: Noémie Boulanger-Lapointe



Black Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Josephine: *“You know they say the blackberries too...you can’t eat the whole thing, there’s something...”*

Darrel: *“You just chew them up. Have the juice.”*

Josephine: *“You drink the juice...chew it up, drink the juice and, spit the rest out, ah?”*

Darrel: *“Yeah.”*

Josephine: *“They say that because you could get constipated from...you’re going to have hard time going washroom with the blackberries.”*

Darrel: *“Yeah. So we just, so when we’re picking berries and there’s a lot of blackberries we just chew them up, have the juice, and then spit them out.”*

Josephine: *“Spit the rest out.”*

— Josephine and Darrel Nasogaluak, Tuktoyaktuk, 2024

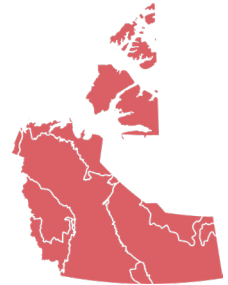


Blueberry / Bog Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*)



Other names: Jàk zheii, anùh (unripe blueberries), dindèzri' (ripe blueberries), Gwichya Gwich'in; jak naalyuu or jak zheii, jak naaluu or inùh (unripe blueberries), dindèzrii (ripe blueberries), Teetf'it Gwich'in; naalyuu, Gwich'in; dziewà or jìewà, Tłı̨cḥq Yatì; uquk, Sallirmiutun; kigutingningnaq, Kangiryuarmiutun; jíeddhá, Dene Zhatié; jíe deht'ée, Dene Yatíé; alpine bilberry, bog blueberry, tundra bilberry, western huckleberry.

Identification and habitat: Shrub growing 20-60 cm tall, although it can be substantially smaller in tundra areas. The stem branches a lot. Oval leaves grow alternately on the stem; the widest part of the leaf is above the middle (i.e., more towards the tip). The leaves may be either smooth or hairy but have no teeth along their edges. The colour of the leaf is paler on the underside and veins are easily visible. In Nunavut, the leaves have been observed as being blue green in summer, turning red in the fall. Flowers are pink and shaped like upside down, broad vases. Each flower has four lobes, and they grow in clusters of up to four flowers at the junction where the leaf meets the branch. Fruit is blue with a powdery coating on the surface and roundish. The fruit is sometimes a bit hidden beneath the leaves. Grows in bogs, heath, and tundra – essentially moist, acidic soils. Often found alongside willows or in open forests near lakes.



Indigenous knowledge holders have observed blueberries growing with other kinds of shrubs, but without many willows, with moss, in wet, fairly open areas, including in the mountains and alongside creeks, in rocky and mossy areas, but also open areas in association with spruce. The berries grow in a bunch, like cranberries, but the plants grow taller than cranberries. Darker, almost black blueberries are sweeter. Ready to be picked in the Gwich'in in mid-July, lasting anywhere from one week to a month. Some knowledge holders rely on whitefish egg availability to indicate the start of blueberry picking season.



Bog Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Bog Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*)
Photo Credit: Noémie Boulanger-Lapointe

“And, I even remember in the summertime after we went for berries, my mom would used to cook up all the fish guts, you know, clean them, cook the fish guts, and then she would put the blueberries in there. Oh! What did Neil Colin call that? Tennessee dessert!”

— Sarah Jerome, Inuvik, 2023

Similar species: The term ‘blueberry’ is often used to refer to any of several kinds of berries commonly picked in the NWT, including blueberries, bilberries, and huckleberries. Bog Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), with a range that encompasses the large majority of the NWT, is the most common of these species, but Dwarf Bilberry (*Vaccinium cespitosum*), Mountain Huckleberry (*Vaccinium membranaceum*), Oval-leaved Blueberry (*Vaccinium ovalifolium*), and Velvet-leaved Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtilloides*) are likely also picked, to greater or lesser degrees, depending on where in the NWT you are picking. All five species have deciduous leaves (leaves fall off in the fall), and sweet, blue berries. They can be distinguished from one another through differences in range and physical traits.

Bog Bilberry occurs across most of the NWT, while Dwarf Bilberry, Mountain Huckleberry, and Oval-leaved Blueberry are only known to occur in the mountainous areas of the territory; in fact, in the NWT, Oval-leaved Blueberry is known only from one site in the Mackenzie Mountains along the Yukon border. In contrast, Velvet-leaved Blueberry grows only in the Shield area of the NWT.

Physically, Dwarf Bilberry can be distinguished by leaves that are toothed in the top half and flowers that grow alone rather than in clusters. The flowers of Mountain Huckleberry also grow alone, but it is typically the tallest of the five species, growing up to 2 m tall. The leaves are serrated along the edges and are pointed at the tips. Unlike the other four species, the berries of Mountain Huckleberry lack a powdery coating. Oval-leaved Blueberry has flowers that come out either before or at the same time as the large, oval, leaves. Warty and slightly to densely hairy stems, along with flowers that grow in tight clusters, distinguish the Velvet-leaved Blueberry from the previous four species.



Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*)



Other names: Nakàl, Gwichya Gwich'in; nakal, Teet'it Gwich'in; nakahl, nabat (referring to salmonberries, which is considered a synonym for yellowberries in Andre & Fehr, 2002), Gwich'in; gots'òkà, Tłı̄chǫ Yatı̄; aqpīk, Inuvialuktun; ts'ueká, Dene Zhatı̄é; ts'uká, Dene Yatı̄é; bakeapple, baked-apple, yellowberry, knuckles or knuckleberry (considered a misspelling of nakal from Gwich'in).

Identification and habitat: Large, round, five-lobed, kidney-shaped, somewhat leathery leaves with serrated edges. Vertical stem growing less than 20 cm tall with no branching and one to three leaves topped with a single large white flower that has five rounded petals. Berries are first bright red, turning a more amber colour and then a pale yellow as they ripen. They somewhat resemble a raspberry. Fruit drops off the plant after it ripens. Common in moist, grassy areas such as bogs, wet meadows, and on the tundra.



Indigenous knowledge holders typically observed cloudberrries growing best in very wet, fairly open, and cool areas (i.e., go further north or higher in elevation to find more), including in swampy areas, around lakes and marshes, and along the coast. They are also commonly observed in moist areas on the mountains. They may grow with willows (also known as cotton trees), as water is thought to collect at these locations. Although they're observed in open areas, knowledge holders stressed that too much sun and heat could easily cook the fruit and make it unsuitable for picking (i.e., drying out, moldy, white, shriveled, soft, grey, rotting). The berry picking season for cloudberrries can be quite short, so interviewees described needing to pay special attention to when they were ready to be picked to get to them in time. The plants bloom in June and July in the Gwich'in Settlement Region. Ready to harvest in the Gwich'in starting in mid-July and lasting anywhere from one week to a month.

“And nakals are the same way [as blueberries]. They like open. It's usually in a clear area, yeah. If you find them, it's mostly in willow areas. Yeah. And I find that, if they're in the willow areas, because that's where the water could collect, though they're usually bigger in there. So, if it's a really dry summer, head for the willows, especially when we're in the mountains. Yeah.”

— Diane Baxter, Inuvik, 2023



Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke



Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke

Uses: Edible and prized by many northerners. The taste is perhaps somewhat unexpected and sweetens substantially once cooked, although the berries are valued by many raw. Good in jam. An excellent base for fruit crumble. A tea of the flowers has been used to soothe the eyes, while chewed berries can be used on wounds. Also eaten by swans, geese, sandhill cranes, bears, and even caribou.

“You start it off with peaches and sugar [for friendship cake], and ten days later you add fruit cocktail and sugar, and it sort of smells like brew and you have to stir it every day and it sit for forty days on the counter. I don’t have it going because it’s too hot, it might get mouldy. But in the wintertime, I do it, and last year I put nakals in it. Oh, was it ever good!”

— Joanne Tetlich, Fort McPherson, 2023



Cranberry/Mountain Cranberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*)

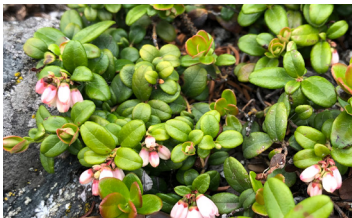


Other names: Natl'at or natl'at, Gwich'in; ᐃᓴ'ᑖ, Tłı̨chɔ Yatı̨; kimmingnaq, Sallirmiutun; itł'é, Délı̨ne Got'ı̨ne; ᑭᓴᓴᑖ, K'ashógot'ı̨ne xədə; itł'é, Shútaqt'ı̨ne; netł'é, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatié; lingonberry, rock cranberry, lowbush cranberry, dry ground cranberry, fox berry, lingberry, northern mountain cranberry, partridgeberry, redberry.

Identification and habitat: Mat-forming low-lying shrub growing 5-20 cm tall. Thick, shiny, evergreen leaves are slightly dome-shaped with a prominent “crack” in the center. The undersides of the leaves have black bristly points visible on them. Flowers in the spring are white to pink and bell-shaped, divided into four parts, with the tip of each division curled slightly backwards. Small red, shiny berries are in place by late August. Grows in open forests as well as fairly dry, rocky areas. Common.



Indigenous knowledge holders note that cranberries are typically found growing low to the ground, in mossy, spongy areas, where there's lots of water to keep them growing and in dry caribou moss. They are observed in open forests, including with spruce and birch trees, and sometimes with willows. They grow particularly well around tree stumps and beside large, lone trees, as well as beneath deadfall, in between cracks in the rocks, and in rich, sandy soils. They may also be found growing in the mountains, on slopes. They often grow in association with juniper and common bearberry. The berries are considered ripe when they develop a dark red, wine colour. They often grow in bunches of six or more berries. They somewhat resemble the berries of common bearberry, and are sometimes mistaken for each other as they can grow in the same patches. However, cranberries are tastier and juicier and tend to be a darker red. Berries are best harvested around the time of the first snow, including August through September and into October, when the frost makes the berries sweeter. Cranberries stay good for picking under the snow through the winter, and in this context, April may also be a particularly good time to pick them.



Cranberry/Mountain Cranberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*)
Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Cranberry/Mountain Cranberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*)
Photo Credit: Michele Grabke

“They kind of like rocky, sand areas, mossy. Around moss and the other small plants, you would normally find the bearberries, the kinnikinnicks, and the cranberries growing together. I find cranberries too, they often like the side of little hills and stuff, and kind of the lower-lying areas as well, probably how they get water. And they must get some of their water from the moss too. Like, the moss must absorb, because they do like to be around the moss as well.”

— Chloe Dragon-Smith, Fort Chipewyan, 2023

Similar species: There are two other kinds of cranberries in the NWT. Small Bog Cranberry (*Vaccinium microcarpum*) is a very small plant that often creeps along *Sphagnum* mosses. The Small Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) is also present in the NWT, and while similar to Small Bog Cranberry, Small Cranberry has larger flowers (>5 mm versus <5 mm), longer stems (>30 cm versus <30 cm), and flower stems (attaching each flower to the stem) that bear soft hairs (versus no hairs on Small Bog Cranberry).

Uses: The berries can be quite sour but are generally thought to sweeten after a frost. Preserves and baking are common uses of the berries. They can also be used mixed with cooked/mashed loche (burbot) liver or fish eggs, used in it’suh, or as part of pemmican with either fish or caribou meat. Juice from cooked berries is considered helpful for kidney and digestive problems. Other medicinal uses, using various preparations, include for treatment of colds and coughs. Considered better for medicine after a winter (spring picking). The juice also makes an excellent dye for fish scales, hides, and quills. Many animals make use of these berries, with grouse, swans, geese, ptarmigan, sandhill cranes, bears, and squirrels known to eat the fruit.

“We use some of the roots. Yeah, because cranberry is good for your kidneys. You just take the root and you grind them up. Yeah, and they’re really good for your kidneys. You make tea out of them, eh?”

— Don Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024

Juniper (*Juniperus* species)

Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*)



Other names: Deetree jak t'an, deetree jak, deetree jàk, Gwichya Gwich'in; ts'iivii ch'ok, Teett'it Gwich'in; wohgwł dzii or wohgwł jii (owl berry), wohgwł dziiʔoò or wohgwłjiiʔoò (owl berry bough), Tł̨chq̨ Yatii; crowberries, whiteberries, blackberries. For Creeping Juniper only: dwarf juniper, ground juniper, creeping savin, horizontal juniper, prostrate juniper.

Common
Juniper



Creeping
Juniper



Identification and habitat:

There are two kinds of juniper that grow in the NWT: Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*). In some respects, the two species resemble one another quite a bit. They are both low growing, spreading, evergreen (staying green throughout the year) shrubs that favour dry, open, and sometimes rocky areas. Both also produce berries (technically cones) that are blue with a powdery coating on them when ripe. However, the two species are easily distinguished by their leaves and the manner in which the berries grow. The leaves of the Common Juniper are very sharp needles, whereas those of the Creeping Juniper look like soft scales or shingles, lying tightly against the branches. While the berries of the Common Juniper are attached directly to the branches, those of the Creeping Juniper grow curved backwards on short stalks.

Both species are harvested in the NWT, although Common Juniper is certainly more commonly harvested. Juniper is a deeply important medicinal plant in the NWT, with clear protocols in the Gwich'in Settlement Region that had to be adhered to during harvest. Berries can be picked throughout the year but typically ripen in August.





Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*) Photo Credit: Emma Pike

Uses: Juniper is the only berry used in the NWT primarily for its medicinal properties. A tea of the berries, branches, and/or roots is used for colds, chest pains, back pain, as a laxative, or in the bath. Berries can also be used to flavour gin and as an aromatic addition to many meals.

CAUTION: Considered safe to use in small quantities but may be toxic to ingest in larger quantities.

“We have those kind of juniper, soft ones, yeah. The, the, the stem is good for colds, if you’re boiling... If you, if our Elders in the past, when they got colds, really bad chest colds, eh? They would look around for this kind, and they boil it and drink it, and it would help their colds.”

— Rosa Huskey, Behchokò, 2023

Raspberry (*Rubus species*)

Raspberries are a popular treat for pickers in the NWT! There are three kinds of raspberries in the territory, including the prickly Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) shrub that most pickers will be familiar with, as well as the much smaller Arctic Raspberry (*Rubus arcticus*) and Dwarf Raspberry (*Rubus pubescens*).

Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*)



Other names: Ts'eenakal, ts'ee nakal', Gwich'in; dahkàà, Tłı̨chǫ Yatı̨; dahkáá, Dene Zhatı̨é/Dene Yatı̨é; raspberry, wild red raspberry, American red raspberry, common red raspberry, wild raspberry, plumboy, grey-leaved raspberry. Note that the species *Rubus idaeus* includes two subspecies: a native subspecies *R. i. strigosus* and a non-native subspecies *R. i. idaeus*. No non-native occurrences of the Red Raspberry have been reported in the wild in the NWT to date.

Identification and habitat: The Red Raspberry is a very prickly, upright shrub. It grows up to 2 m tall but is often much smaller. Leaves grow alternately on the stems and are toothed. Flowers are white and grow in small clusters. Fruit typically ripens to a red colour but may be yellowish as well. The fruit are clusters of small 'drupelets'; the cluster is hollow in the center.



Although the plant is considered fairly common except in the far north, only a few of the Indigenous knowledge holders we spoke to talked about picking raspberries regularly. Although widely distributed, it was clear that they don't tend to grow densely. They are typically observed growing along rivers or around lakes, and in open environments, including disturbed areas like trails. Like many other berries, they prefer wet areas. The berries are usually ripe by mid-summer. Knowledge holders tend to associate them more with poplar and willow, rather than spruce trees.

Uses: Edible raw or cooked. Rich in vitamin C. A popular choice for preserves.



Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) Photo Credit: Catherine Graydon

Arctic Raspberry (*Rubus arcticus*) & Dwarf Raspberry (*Rubus pubescens*)

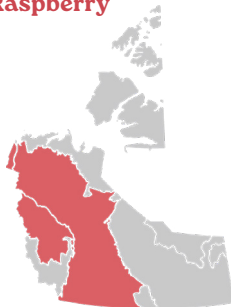


Other names: Arctic Raspberry: Arctic bramble, nagoonberry, dwarf nagoonberry, dwarf raspberry, nagoon berry, plumboy, strawberry, and stemless Arctic bramble. Dwarf Raspberry: ts'ale jíé, Dene Zhatié; ts'ale kezhié, Dene Yatié; frogberry, creeping red raspberry, dewberry, dwarf red raspberry, swamp red raspberry, and trailing red raspberry.

Identification and habitat:

The Arctic Raspberry typically grows in dense clusters 5-30 cm tall. The stem is woody, slender, and branching. Each plant has 2-5 leaves that are each divided into three toothed leaflets. Showy, solitary, sweet-smelling flowers range from deep pink to purple in colour. Sweet, juicy, red fruit. Often found growing amongst willows, the plant is fairly common in moist areas, including tundra, meadows, and alongside streams. The Dwarf Raspberry also grows in dense clusters, with woody stems, but typically creeping along the ground with stems 20-50 cm in length. The stems grow slightly curved upwards. Leaves have 3-5 lobes. The plant produces one to several small white to pinkish flowers and then juicy, sweet red fruit. There is often only one berry produced per plant.

Arctic Raspberry



Dwarf Raspberry



Arctic Raspberry (*Rubus arcticus*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

Uses: The fruit of both Arctic Raspberry and Dwarf Raspberry is delicate and sweet. Neither plant produces a lot of fruit, so it's best to eat these fresh, as you find them.

“With the raspberries, the roots of the raspberry bush and the roots of the rosehips, and the rosehips themselves, and the raspberries themselves...If you are female and you're going through you, what they call the monthly moon, and you have stomach cramps and stuff, those are boiled into a tea. They're the same effect as if you were taking Midol for your cramps and stomach cramps. And, it's in natural form. And it's just the rosehip and the raspberries, and the roots of those plants.”

— Louise Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024



Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*)



Other names: Nichìh, khòh chan or khòh dachan (stems), khòh (thorns), Gwichya Gwich'in; nichih, khòh chan (stems), khò kak at' an chik (rose plant), Teet'it Gwich'in; nichih t'àn (petals) Gwichya Gwich'in and Teet'it Gwich'in; dahba (plant), [ch] or [ts] (rosehip), [ch]ghoò or [ts]ghoò (rose bough or rosebush), Tłı̨chǫ Yatı̨; jìchí, Dene Zhatíé/Dene Yatíé, bristly rose, wild prickly rose, prickly wild rose, rose hips, itchy bums.

Identification and habitat: Grows up to around 1.5 m tall but is often shorter. Prickly, thorny shrub with leaves that have 3-9 divisions (leaflets), each of which is serrated and smooth on the upper side of the leaflet. Flowers are pink with five petals and each one grows alone (not in clusters). Fruit is called a rosehip and is red when ripe and oblong in shape. Indigenous knowledge holders indicate that the flowers blossom in the spring through July depending on where you live in the NWT, with rosehips developing later in summer and into September, but remaining good to eat from the bush well into winter. Grows in open areas and forests, and along roadsides and riverbanks, but in dry ground.



Similar species: There are two other rose species in the NWT that may be confused with Prickly Rose; both are considered rare and have substantially more restricted ranges than the Prickly Rose. The Smooth Rose (*Rosa blanda*) is known only from around Wrigley in the NWT, has groups of 5-7 serrated leaflets, and flowers that grow in clusters of 1-5. The Woods' Rose (*Rosa woodsii*) is known only from the upper Mackenzie River area, also has groups of 5-7 serrated leaflets, and flowers that grow in clusters of between one and ten flowers. The rosehips are smaller and rounder than those of the Prickly Rose. The prickles can also help you tell these plants apart from the Prickly Rose – the prickles on the Prickly Rose are straight, while they are curved on the other two roses. The Smooth Rose also has few, if any, prickles (very much unlike the Prickly Rose), while the prickles on the Woods' Rose appear on the main stem in pairs of two.

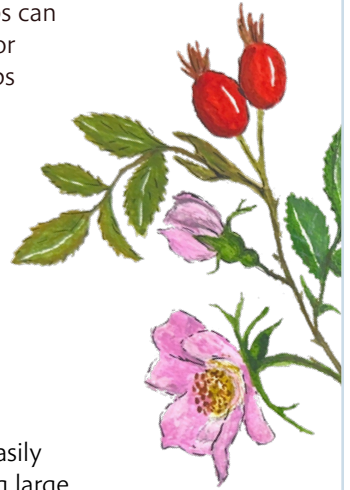


Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke



Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) Photo Credit: Andy Fyon

Uses: High in vitamins, including vitamin C. Rosehips can be eaten raw (minus the seeds; see caution below), or fried, and the juice can be used in preserves. Rosehips have been used as part of pemmican, mixed with either fish or caribou meat. Juice from unripe berries is high in pectin and can be used to thicken other food products. The flowers can also be used in preserves like jelly, in baking, or cosmetically (e.g., rose water). Rose water can be used as an eye wash, or for heat rash and cuts. Rosehips are eaten by grouse and bears.



CAUTION: Remove hairs and seeds prior to eating rosehips; it is thought that ingesting these materials can cause an itchy bum. This can be accomplished easily by straining after cooking. Likewise, avoid consuming large quantities of rose hips as this can cause diarrhea.

“Well, I love rosehips for many different reasons. So, of course, like the rosebush itself, I’ve, you know, collected the petals and I’ve made rose petal jelly. And, oh, I love actually just collecting the rose petals and putting them in honey...it’s just so delicious. But the bud itself, I mean, I’ve done different things. I’ve made jelly with it too. But that wasn’t something that I learned growing up. It was just as I got older, I’m like, ‘Oh, I wonder what I can do with this.’ You know, searching, researching about it, and finding all of the great benefits of having the bud, and just drying them. And what I’ve done quite a few years ago, is I’ve picked a lot, and I’ve just dried them, and throughout the winter, I’ll put maybe three, four in my coffee, so I know I’m reaping the benefits of it, you know? Or even just in having hot water with it, like...I’ve given containers to my son. He was off at school. So, you know, just sending that with him, just to keep up his immune system.”

— Julie Beaver, Fort Smith, 2024

Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)



Other names: K'è̀è̀dzie, k'è̀è̀jje or k'ìajjìe, Tìlchò Yatì; k'ìjjé, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatìé; juneberry, saskatoon serviceberry, serviceberry, western serviceberry, northwestern serviceberry.

Identification and habitat: Tree-like shrub, rarely over 2 m tall (but up to 4.5 m), with smooth dark brown-reddish bark that grays with age. Forms small colonies/thickets connected by runners (i.e., it spreads underground). Oval, toothed, smooth leaves grow alternately on the stem. Flowers grow in clusters and are white with five petals, occasionally pinkish in colour. Fruit ripens to a deep purple colour and grows in drooping clusters along branches. The many seeds in the fruit are spread by birds. Grows in open areas.

Saskatoons grow wild in the southern NWT and are also popular for garden cultivation. Both wild and cultivated bushes are picked. In the wild, saskatoons tend to be associated with open areas, with ample sunlight and moisture, including riverbanks. However, it was also observed that at times, full direct sunlight may be too intense, and some shade may be beneficial. Saskatoons are associated with mixed forest and poplar stands.



Uses: This excellent and abundant fruit can be used dried, mixed into pemmican, or added to preserves and baked goods. Reported medicinal uses include to treat stomach problems, to help recover after childbirth, for whooping cough, urinary problems, and headaches.



Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke



“Saskatoons in the bush as well, you can find saskatoons, but they seem to like maybe a little more light, so along the riverbanks or else, cleared areas around here, like around where it’s cleared around the cabin. There we can find saskatoons on good years for them, but been quite some years since there’s been saskatoons here. So, they’re struggling with the dry weather maybe, would be my guess.”

— Chloe Dragon-Smith, Fort Chipewyan, 2024



Soapberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*)



Other names: Dinjik jàk, Gwichya Gwich'in; dinjik jàk, Teet'it Gwich'in; ts'enexoh, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatié; bitterberry, Canada buffaloberry, low buffaloberry, russet buffaloberry, soopolallie, buffalo-berry, mooseberry.

Identification and habitat: Shrub grows less than 2 m tall. Grows in open, dry sites along the edges of forests and streams. The bark is dotted with orange spots. Thick leaves grow opposite one another on the stem and are oval in shape. Flowers are yellowish in colour, tiny, and bloom on the plant early in the spring before the leaves come out. The berries are usually bright red and grow in small clusters on the plant.

Soapberries are not commonly picked in the NWT, although the plant is observed growing in dry, wooded areas. The berries are noted as having a soapy taste and usually ripen towards the end of July.



Uses: Edible raw or cooked. The berries can be mixed with either fish or caribou to make a kind of pemmican. The fruit may be eaten raw for colds or a tea of the stems and roots, sometimes mixed with juniper berries, can be consumed for digestion. A tea made from the branches can be used to help treat skin irritations and infections.

CAUTION: the fruit contains a compound that can cause stomach irritation.



Soapberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

Squashberry (*Viburnum edule*)



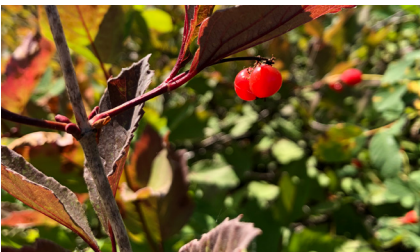
Other names: Nee'yuu, Gwich'in (unclear if this is different from red currants); dahtl'ij, Tłı̨chǫ Yatıı; máttı̨jı̨lu, Dene Zhatié; ttı̨jı̨lu, Dene Yatié; highbush cranberry, mooseberry, moosewood viburnum, squashberry viburnum, high-bush cranberry. In some areas of Canada, this is referred to as low bush cranberry.

Identification and habitat: Shrub grows up to around 2 m tall. Rounded leaves grow opposite one another on the stem and have three toothed lobes. There are two notches at the end of each leaf. Leaves turn red in the autumn. The young leaves have hairs growing on their undersides. Flowers are white to greenish, tube shaped, divided into five petals and grow in clusters between leaf pairs on the stem. The fruit ranges from red to orange and each one has a flat stone inside it. The fruit ripens as the leaves turn red in the fall. Grows in cold, moist, and open areas. Wait until after first frost to pick these for added sweetness.



Indigenous knowledge holders indicated that this plant grows around lake shores and along riverbanks, in the bush and under the canopy alongside willow, poplar, and thorn bushes. The fruit is red in colour when ripe. Easily recognized by most pickers due to the odour the ripe fruit gives off, somewhat like old socks.

Uses: A tea of the berries has been used by the Tłı̨chǫ for urinary and constipation issues. Also makes a lovely jelly. Eaten by moose. **CAUTION:** remove the stones prior to eating.



Squashberry (*Viburnum edule*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Squashberry (*Viburnum edule*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

“These smell like stinky socks. They’re stinky, stinky, but my grandmother on my dad’s side said she picks them and makes jelly out of them.”

— Shirley Coumont, Yellowknife, 2023

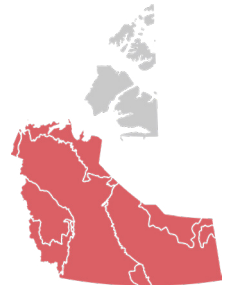
Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)



Other names: Ijdzee, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatié; Virginia strawberry, blue-leaf strawberry, mountain strawberry, common strawberry, scarlet strawberry, thick-leaved strawberry, woods strawberry, smooth wild strawberry.

Identification and habitat: Characterised by long red runners, covered in hairs, rooting in multiple places. Leaves have long stalks with three divisions (called leaflets) with toothed/serrated ends. The tooth on the tip of each leaflet is shorter than the other teeth on the leaves. Sports white, five-petaled flowers that grow in clusters of between 2-15. Juicy red, roundish fruit with many seeds visible on the surface. Grows in open areas, often in disturbed sites. Very common.

Indigenous knowledge holders note that strawberries are considered a treat, with picking volumes typically less than other berries, but deeply prized when available. Strawberry plants prefer sandy, well-watered soils, and summer heat.



Similar species: One other species of strawberry occurs in the NWT, the Woodland Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*). However, it is very rare and has only been reported from the upper Mackenzie drainage north to Fort Simpson. The Woodland Strawberry looks quite similar to the Wild Strawberry, but the tooth on the tip of each leaflet is longer than the other teeth on the leaves.

Uses: Edible and very tasty, either raw or cooked. Strawberries are a popular choice for preserves and baking.



Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer





Other Berries



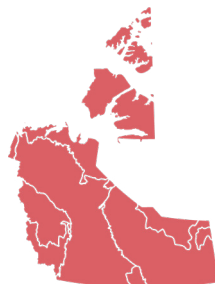
Common Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)



Other names: Dàn daih, Gwichya Gwich'in; dandaih, Teet'it Gwich'in; ᐃᓄᓄᓄ or ᓄᓄᓄᓄ, Tłı̨chǫ Yatı̨; kinnickinnick, bearberries, mealberries, sandberries, stoneberries.

Identification and habitat: Low-lying, trailing, heavily branched, evergreen, and horizontal shrub. Reddish to dark gray peeling bark. Teardrop/oval shaped leaves (rounded end pointing outwards) that grow alternately on the stem. Flowers range from pink to white, are shaped like little upside-down vases, and drooping. Fruit bright to dull red and mealy. The plant grows in well-drained, open areas, including rock outcrops and open forests.

Indigenous knowledge holders consider this plant as being commonly present in the NWT. It can be found in the mountains, including on slopes, in dry, forested areas, including spruce stands, and alongside cranberries. Berries are ready to be picked in the autumn. The fruit is picked only occasionally, although its importance to bears is known.



Uses: Edible, with a dry, mealy taste. Can be used in preserves, it'suh, and pemmican. Eaten by a range of birds and animals, including bears.



Common Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)
Photo Credit: Michele Grabke



Common Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)
Photo Credit: Emma Pike



“And then there is another one. I don’t know the name of it, but it looks like a cranberry. It looks the same, but it’s a little bit orange? It’s orange, but the inside it’s like a little powdered thing? We don’t eat it raw. We have to eat it with some like, in the old days they use it with raw fish eggs. ‘Cause if you eat it raw it’s going to make you constipated. That’s the reason why.”

— Mary Ann Jeremick’ca, Whati, 2024





Red Bearberry (*Arctous rubra*), Alpine Bearberry (*Arctous alpina*)

Other names: Dzhii ndèe', Gwichya Gwich'in; shih jak, Teett'it Gwich'in; jhk'adzìì or jhk'ajìì, Tłı̨chɔ Yatı̨; kabla, Kangiryuarmiutun; siksik berries, ground squirrel berries, bird eye, whiskeyjack berry, bearberry. For Red Bearberry only; red alpine bearberry, red manzanita, red-fruit bearberry, swampberry. For Alpine Bearberry only; alpine manzanita, blackberries, black bearberry, ptarmiganberry, mountain bearberry, torpedo berry, black alpine bearberry, whortleberry, Arctic bearberry.

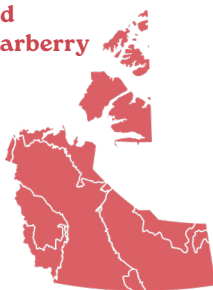
Identification and habitat:

These two shrubs are quite similar in appearance, growing low to the ground, with fairly large, wrinkly leaves that turn red in the autumn (perhaps the namesake for Red Mountain in the Gwich'in Settlement Area). Flowers are small, range from pinkish to yellow green in colour, and come out early in the spring.

Red Bearberries grow in moist, open forests and in rocky tundra areas, including beneath cliffs on slanted ground that catches draining water, while Alpine Bearberries grow in alpine tundra areas for the most part, often in peat soils. The fruit of the Red Bearberry are red, resembling the fruit of the red currant, and the fruit of the Alpine Bearberry are black. The fruit of the Red Bearberry are also typically larger than those of the Alpine Bearberry, and the leaves of the Red Bearberry plant fall off in the autumn. The Alpine Bearberry also has leaf stems that have hairs on them, while the leaf stems on the Red Bearberry are hairless.

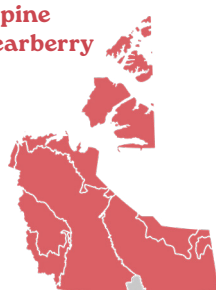
Red

Bearberry



Alpine

Bearberry



Uses: Edible. Berries are very juicy – juicy enough to help if you’re thirsty. Can be used in pemmican, mixed with either fish or caribou meat. The leaves can be used to make tea at any stage of growth. Some Indigenous knowledge holders in the Gwich’in Settlement Area indicated that it was primarily girls who ate these berries. Ptarmigan are known to eat these berries.

“When the berries are ready to pick, you could see the patches, even from outside my house I could see them across there. They get really red. The leaves get really red, not green like these... But ours on the island the leaves get really red, and you could see the red patches. They’re very visible, and like she [Mary Kudlak] said in Minto, you know like below the cliffs...Not on the cliff, below the cliffy areas, on the side of the big hill there, and on the top parts of where the tents used to be.”

— Helen Kitekudlak, Ulukhaktok, 2024



Red Bearberry (*Arctous rubra*)
Photo Credit: Andrew Robinson



Red Bearberry (*Arctous rubra*)
Photo Credit: Johanna Stewart



Red Bearberry (*Arctous rubra*)
Photo Credit: Emma Pike



Alpine Bearberry (*Arctous alpina*)
Photo Credit: Catherine Graydon



Alpine Bearberry (*Arctous alpina*)
Photo Credit: Noémie Boulanger-Lapointe

Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)



Other names: Nogíe jíé, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatié, Canada bunchberry, Canadian dwarf cornel, cornel-berry, crackerberry, creeping dogwood, dwarf cornel, dwarf dogwood, Canada dogwood.

Identification and habitat: Stem 8-15 cm tall and sometimes forming quite dense patches. What look like four (sometimes 3-7) greenish-white petals are actually bracts (modified leaves). Each plant has 4-7 bright green leaves that shift to a dark red or purplish colour in the fall. Fruit is reddish in colour and grow in clusters at the center of the plant. Bunchberries employ 'explosive' pollination, where pressure on the flower triggers it to burst open and explosively release the pollen.



Uses: The fruit is mild-tasting and edible. It can be used in preserves, baking, or just for eating raw.



Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*) Photo Credit: Reid Hildebrandt



Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

“And there’s also bunchberries. Bunchberries are the little orange berries that grow close to the cranberries, and you’ll see a whole bunch of them growing on what looks like a clover leaf. There’s three leaves on the plant. And, right at the top of the three leaves is you’ll see a clump of little orange berries. We call them bunchberries. They’re kind of starchy and have actually no taste to them, but they are edible. They are very edible berries, and they’re good for also cooking in stews and soups.”

— Louise Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024



Clasping-leaved Twisted-stalk (*Streptopus amplexifolius*)



Other names: Twistedstalk, clasping twisted-stalk, claspleaf twistedstalk, liverberry, white twisted-stalk, white mandarin, watermelon berry.

Identification and habitat: Grows up to around 90 cm tall. Very long leaves grow alternately around the branching stem. Flowers grow either alone or in pairs at the junctions where leaves meet the stem, are a somewhat green to white colour, with what appear to be six petals that curve backwards, and hang below the leaves on slim, jointed stems. The fruit appears as a large, red, oblong berry when ripe. In the NWT, this species has only been reported from the southwestern part of the territory, in the Liard River valley and hot springs in the Mackenzie Mountains. The plants generally occur in moist, shaded areas.



Uses: The plant has been used as food, and medicinally for burns. Small mammals are known to consume the fruit.

CAUTION: The plant and berries are edible, and the berries are reportedly very tasty but may have a laxative effect if eaten in large volumes. Knowledge holders in the NWT didn't speak about these berries, but some Indigenous peoples elsewhere consider the plant and the berries poisonous.



Clasping-leaved Twisted-stalk
(*Streptopus amplexifolius*)
Photo Credit: Bruce Bennett



Clasping-leaved Twisted-stalk
(*Streptopus amplexifolius*)
Photo Credit: Emma Pike



Clasping-leaved Twisted-stalk
(*Streptopus amplexifolius*)
Photo Credit: Bruce Bennett

Canada Gooseberry (*Ribes oxyacanthoides*)



Other names: Dahghoò, Tł̓ch̓q Yatii; dahghozé, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatie; bristly wild gooseberry, northern gooseberry, Canadian gooseberry, smooth gooseberry, American mountain gooseberry, wild gooseberry.

Identification and habitat: Very prickly stems and branches. Branches grow upwards or along the ground. Plant rarely grows any taller than 50 cm tall. Leaves grow alternately on the stems and have 3-5 lobes. They are hairy on the undersides and turn red in the fall after frosts start. The petiole (leaf stalk) is quite long. Flowers are very small and white to green/yellow in colour and look a bit like little tubes growing alone or in groups of up to three. Fruit ranges from red to blue-red to a purple-black colour and is round and smooth. The remains of the dry flower stick out the end of the berries. Grows in open and rocky areas and moist forests.



Uses: Very good eaten raw but also great cooked in preserves like jam. Medicinal uses include treatment of bladder, menstrual, and post-childbirth illnesses. The Tł̓ch̓q traditionally used a tea of the stems for mouth infections, stomach aches, respiratory issues, and to soothe sore eyes. The spines on the stems can be used to remove splinters or pierce boils.



Canada Gooseberry (*Ribes oxyacanthoides*)
Photo Credit: Kathy Stewart



Canada Gooseberry (*Ribes oxyacanthoides*)
Photo Credit: Hunter Jackson

“Yeah, gooseberry and raspberry, they picked too. They picked those two berries, the dahghoò [gooseberry] and the dahkàà [raspberry]. And, and that’s that recipe that they eat it together. And they’d mix it together and eat it. That was the favourite. It was just sweet, because that was the only sweet thing you could get. You couldn’t get any sugar, nothing, no can, no food from the store. So, that was just like can of fruit for us.”

— Rosa Huskey, Behchokò (Interpreted)



Cherries (*Prunus* species)



Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Other names: Common chokecherry, eastern chokecherry, red chokecherry, wild cherry.

Identification and habitat: Shrub that can grow up to 4 m tall. Oval leaves grow alternately on the stem. Small, very sweet-smelling flowers with five petals that grow in long clusters. Many visible stamens (little hair-like things that stick out of the middle of the flower). Fruit is shiny, black, and round, also growing in clusters. Prefers open, dry areas. Leaves turn red in the fall.



Pin Cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*)

Other names: Bird cherry, fire cherry, wild red cherry, Pennsylvania cherry.

Identification and habitat: Shrub growing up to 16 m tall. Lance-shaped leaves grow alternately on the stem. Fruit is red and not quite round, also growing in clusters. Small flowers with five petals growing in clusters. As with Chokecherry, there are many visible stamens in the flowers. Grows in open areas.



Uses: For both Chokecherry and Pin Cherry, the fruit can be very sour but makes lovely jelly. Fruit may be sweeter after a frost. In some areas, this fruit was used as part of pemmican. The berries are eaten by various birds and animals. **CAUTION:** The berries are edible, although note that the seed inside the fruit should not be eaten because it contains hydrocyanic acid (cyanide). The same toxin is found in the bark and leaves of the plant and should therefore also be avoided.



Chokecherry
(*Prunus virginiana*)
Photo Credit: Catriona Leven



Chokecherry
(*Prunus virginiana*)
Photo Credit: Norbert Kondla



Pin Cherry
(*Prunus pensylvanica*)
Photo Credit: Mac Post



Pin Cherry
(*Prunus pensylvanica*)
Photo Credit:
Christina Thiebeault

Currants (*Ribes species*)

Bristly Black Currant (*Ribes lacustre*)



Other names: Black gooseberry, black swamp gooseberry, bristly currant, prickly black currant, swamp black currant, swamp currant, swamp gooseberry, prickly currant, bristly black currant.

Identification and habitat: Prickly stems and branches. Generally, gooseberries are prickly, and currants aren't. This species is an exception to that rule. The prickles on this plant grow two different ways: (1) many short and fine prickles and (2) longer, thicker prickles growing in sets of 3-4 at the points where small branches and leaves emerge from the stem. The plant grows up to about 1 m tall. Branches grow upright or outwards. Leaves have 3-5 deep and toothed lobes and grow alternately along the stem. Saucer-shaped flowers are usually in loose clusters of 7-18 that droop downwards. They typically start a pinkish colour and darken to a browner colour as the season progresses. Fruit is dark purple, round, and a bit hairy. Typically grows in moist and open areas, including forests and along rivers.



Uses: Berries are edible but not considered very tasty. They're more bitter than commercially grown black currants.



Bristly Black Currant (*Ribes lacustre*)
Photo Credit: Jozien Keijzer



Bristly Black Currant (*Ribes lacustre*)
Photo Credit: Jozien Keijzer



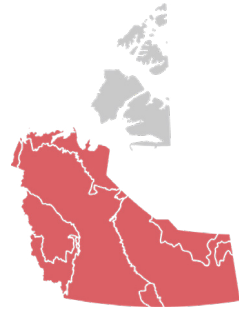
Bristly Black Currant (*Ribes lacustre*)
Photo Credit: Jozien Keijzer

Northern Black Currant (*Ribes hudsonianum*)



Other names: Eneeyù', Gwichya Gwich'in; nee'uu (both red and black varieties), deetree jàk, Gwich'in; Hudson Bay currant, stinking currant, western black currant, wild black currant, black currant, wild black currant.

Identification and habitat: Stems/branches don't have thorns. The branches grow upwards, and the plant can grow up to 1 m tall. Leaves have three lobes, and the stem joining the leaf to the stem/branch is quite long. The leaves have fine hairs along the veins on their undersides. White flowers grow in upright clusters (8-10 flowers/cluster). Flowers have a strong scent. Fruit is black and smooth. Grows in moist areas, including in open forests and near rivers, including swampy areas, as far north as the treeline. Currants don't appear to be commonly picked in the NWT and may be more difficult to find than other kinds of berries. They are known to grow with willows and Prickly Rose. Fruit is strong tasting.



Uses: Fruit is edible but quite bitter. Good for jam. Teas can be made from the leaves and berries, as well as the stems. The berries can be incorporated into pemmican with either fish or caribou meat.

“I never bothered to look around, but you could smell it if you're around it. When you go in a bush, you know what's around so you kind of... red and blackberry, currants.”

— Annie Buckle, Aklavik, 2023



Northern Black Currant (*Ribes hudsonianum*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke

Skunk Currant (*Ribes glandulosum*)



Other names: Fetid currant.

Identification and habitat: Plants can grow up to 1 m tall and often smell distinctly like skunk. The stems do not have thorns and typically sprawl along the ground but may also grow upright. Leaves have 5-7 deep lobes, coming to a point at the tips of each lobe. Edges of leaves are serrated. Flowers grow in groups of 6-15 and are usually pinkish in colour. Berries are dark red in colour and bristly. Often found growing in forests, but also in open areas. Currants don't appear to be commonly picked in the NWT and may be more difficult to find than other kinds of berries. They are known to grow with willows and Prickly Rose. Fruit is strong tasting.



Uses: Berries are edible but not tasty.



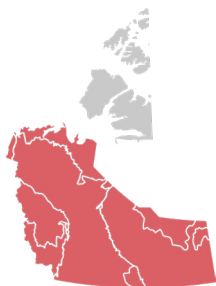
Skunk Currant (*Ribes glandulosum*) Photo Credit: Michele Grabke

Red Currant / Swamp Red Currant (*Ribes triste*)



Other names: Eneeyù', Gwichya Gwich'in; nee'uu, Teet'it Gwich'in; American red currant, wild red currant, northern red currant, red swamp currant, red currant.

Identification and habitat: Grows up to 1.5 m tall but is usually smaller. The plant branches and those branches grow either upright or along the ground. The branches that grow along the ground may set their own roots. The bark often looks like it's peeling off - this is a key method of identifying this plant. Leaves grow



alternately on the stems, have 3-5 lobes, and have fine hairs on them. The stems that join the leaves to the branches are long. Flowers are in drooping clusters of 6-20 flowers and are reddish purple or greenish white. Berries are red when ripe and smooth, usually in late summer. Grows in wet and moist areas, including meadows and forests.

Indigenous knowledge holders indicate these berries usually ripen towards the end of July in the NWT. However, note that it was, at times, unclear whether knowledge holders were talking about Swamp Red Currants or Squashberries as the descriptions for these plants are very similar.

Uses: Sour berries are edible and sought after by some people for use in jams and jellies. Fruit has been used medicinally in some areas to treat sore eyes, while a tea of the stems and inner bark has been used for colds and flu. A tea of the leaves and stem can be made for stomach problems. Known to be eaten by grouse.



Swamp Red Currant (*Ribes triste*)
Photo Credit: Reid Hildebrandt



Swamp Red Currant (*Ribes triste*)
Photo Credit: Bruce Bennett

“And back in the day when my mom used to get us picking berries, right around the camp on the side of the hill used to be lots of red currants. Ooh, we used to pick those and my mom used to cook them up for us. And, was just so good because we never had, like, fresh fruit, eh? Like storebought fruit, like apples, oranges, stuff like that. So, we harvested a lot of our own berries back in the day.”

— Sarah Jerome, Inuvik, 2023

Greene's Mountain-ash (*Sorbus scopulina*)



Other names: Rocky Mountain mountain-ash, western mountain-ash, western mountain ash, Rowan tree.

Identification and habitat: Can grow up to 3 m tall with many branches. Very showy tree with bright leaves and distinct orange or red fruit growing in dense clusters. Shiny leaves are divided into 11-13 (up to 15) toothed leaflets. Flowers are small, white, and grow in clusters. The fruit is shiny and dark orange red.



Uses: The fruit can be used in preserves like jam and wine.



Greene's Mountain-ash (*Sorbus scopulina*)
Photo Credit: Peter Achuff



Greene's Mountain-ash (*Sorbus scopulina*)
Photo Credit: Bruce Bennett

Limber Honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*)

Other names: Red honeysuckle, twining honeysuckle.

Identification and habitat: Semi-erect shrub, trailing or climbing other plants sometimes up to 5 m high. Usually one, sometimes two, clusters of flowers at the ends of branches. Each cluster contains 6 flowers that are yellow to deep red in colour. Flowers look a bit like lipstick, with two lips coming from a slender tube. The top 'lip' is divided into 4 lobes. Leaves grow opposite one another on the stem. The leaves at the tip of the flowering stem, plus one or two pairs below that, may be joined together. The berries are oval or round in shape and range from orange to red in colour. Found in areas with fine sand.



Limber Honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*)
Photo Credit: Claire Singer

Similar species: The Tatarian Honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*) is an alien plant that was introduced from Asia for gardening. It is mostly spread by birds that consume the seeds. Although it is known as an invasive plant in the south, in the NWT it has only been found in the wild in Fort Simpson. It is a tall shrub that can sometimes grow quite densely and shade out other plants. The white to dark pink flowers grow in pairs and resemble those of the Limber Honeysuckle, but the stems do not wrap around other plants.

Uses: Edible. **CAUTION:** Berry consumption could cause fatigue.

“There’s some berries that you will see on certain willows...And, I don’t actually know the name of them. There’s little, small willows that you can find, and it’s almost like a honeysuckle. And, they’re kind of like an orangey-pink colour. Those are also edible. But they can also cause you to, like, get tired, basically, just relax you. So, you’d have to know how much you’d need to pick, or what they’re used for. And, what we used to use them for is we’d dry them and then we’d grind them up, and that is exactly what we use. It’s kind of like a, a natural sleeping pill. And you’ll see them growing where, like the fine, grainy type of sand.”

— Louise Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024

Northern Comandra (*Geocaulon lividum*)



Other names: Earthberry, false toadflax, bastard toad-flax, timberberry, pumpkin berry, dogberry, red-fruited bastard toad-flax.

Identification and habitat: Grows up to around 10-25 cm tall. The plant is semi-parasitic, obtaining nutrients from the roots of other plants in the area, mostly white spruce, but able to photosynthesize through green leaves. Leaves grow alternately on the stem and are somewhat oval in shape. Flowers are green and grow close to the central stem of the plant either alone or in small clusters. The flowers look like they have five greenish petals (although these are not technically petals). Fruit is orange and round. Grows in mossy and open forests.



Uses: Fruit is edible but fairly tasteless. The plant has traditionally been used in treatments for chest illnesses and to poultice wounds. The Tłı̨ch̓q make a tea of the berries for respiratory issues.



Northern Comandra (*Geocaulon lividum*)
Photo Credit: Emma Pike



Northern Comandra (*Geocaulon lividum*)
Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)



Other names: K'łtsi jjié, Dene Zhatié/Dene Yatié; red-osier cornel, red-stemmed dogwood, red willow, dog willow, red dogwood.

Identification and habitat: Shrub that can grow up to 3 m tall in moist and open areas. Leaves grow opposite each other on the reddish stem and are oval or lance shaped. Small, white flowers grow in flat-topped clusters. Fruit is white surrounding a large seed.

Uses: Very bitter but not toxic. Consumed by bears and a variety of birds. The plant has been used to make teas to treat various ailments (e.g., dizziness, coughing, fever, pain) and for sacred ceremonies, while the bark has been used in lieu of tobacco.



Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

“The other ones are the Red Willow, or the Dog Willow, as it’s known to people. The bears will eat that in the spring and in the fall. And what that does is it’ll clear out the stomach of the bear, and it’ll relax its stomach muscles. So it doesn’t cause them to get hungry, and they know that there’s nothing in there to digest because their stomach’s been cleaned out. It helps them to sleep in the winter. It doesn’t give them that stomach of being hungry and stuff. And in the spring, when they come out, and these berries come out, and they have the green berry on the Red Dogwood, they tend to eat that as a reversed reaction from when they ate it in the fall. What, and reversed reaction means is that it starts getting their stomach working. It starts getting rid of the air and the liquid that’s in their stomach so that they can start accepting new food.”

— Louise Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024

Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum* species)

Star-flowered False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum stellatum*)



Other names: Little false Solomon's seal, star-flowered Solomon's seal, starry false lily-of-the-valley, starry false Solomon's seal, starry Solomon's seal, false Solomon's seal.

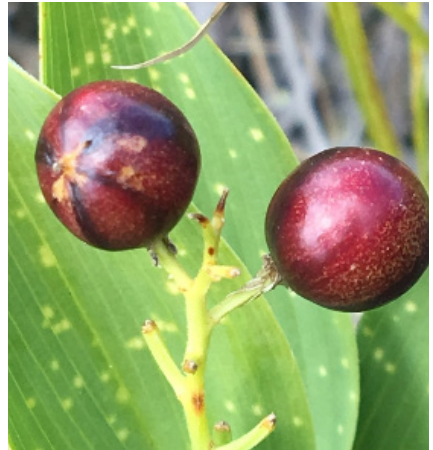
Identification and habitat: Grows 15-55 cm tall. Seven to 13 large, veined leaves growing alternately on the stem. Flowers are white to off-white and resemble stars. They grow spaced apart at the end of the central stem in clusters of 5-10 flowers. Round fruit is greenish yellow in colour with purple stripes and ripens to a dark blue or black colour. Plants can form colonies in moist and open areas.



Uses: Edible fruit but not very tasty. May be consumed by bears in some areas.



Star-flowered False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum stellatum*)
Photo Credit: Hadas Parag



Star-flowered False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum stellatum*)
Photo Credit: Ryan Sealy

Three-leaved False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum trifolium*)



Other names: Swamp false Solomon's seal, three-leaved false lily-of-the-valley, three-leaved Solomon's seal, three-leaved Solomon's-plume.

Identification and habitat: Grows 5-20 cm tall. Usually has three leaves, but sometimes has two, three, or even four leaves. Leaf undersides are smooth. Flowers grow above the leaves. Plant can be found in acidic soils, like bogs and peat.

Uses: Edible, but not commonly harvested.



Three-leaved False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum trifolium*)
Photo Credit: François Rousseau



Three-leaved False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum trifolium*)
Photo Credit: François Rousseau

“It looks like an onion. But it’s small, eh? And when you put it on your mouth, oh my God, your mouth just waters.”

— Helen, Wekweètì, 2023

Strawberry Blite (*Blitum capitatum*)



Strawberry Blite (*Blitum capitatum*)
Photo Credit: Michael J. Oldham

Other names: Indian ink, Indian paintbrush, strawberry goosefoot, strawberry spinach.

Identification and habitat: This annual plant can have many branches and can grow up to a bit over 70 cm tall but is often smaller. Leaves appear triangular. Fruit is bright red, growing in clusters right at the junction of leaf and stem. The plant grows in gravel and disturbed areas. Not commonly picked in the NWT, although some pickers will harvest it.



Uses: Fruit is edible. Young leaves can be eaten by boiling them. The fruits are also crushed and used for painting, and as a dye for hides.

CAUTION: Considered safe to use in small quantities but may be toxic to ingest in larger quantities.

“This here, you got it here, is a Strawberry Blite. Okay, we call it Indian Ink, or Indian Paintbrush. We use that. We use those ones for dyes. Yeah, when you’re dyeing stuff and that. For painting. For art. ...And, if we get enough of that around, we also use it for, say, if you had an old pair of moccasins and they were worn, like the smoke tint comes off the moccasin, ‘cause they’ve been worn down and stuff, that’s our natural dye for getting our moosehide to look like it’s just been freshly made. And, what we do is we’d get enough of that into a bowl, and we grind it. We smash up the little, the little red tough parts...and then we take it and we rub it on the hide, and it looks like a brand-new smoked hide.”

— Louise Beaulieu, Fort Smith, 2024

Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*)



Other names: Small spikenard.

Identification and habitat: Woody plant growing up to about 70 cm and can form an understory layer in forests. Leaves may be whole or divided into three parts, with each of these parts further divided into 3-5 leaflets, with toothed edges. Each leaf can grow up to 30-50 cm long. The flowers grow in umbrella-like or round clusters and are greenish white in colour. The fruit is initially greenish white and then ripens to a dark purple or black colour. It also grows in clusters. Each fruit has a large seed inside. The plant grows in shaded areas like mixed-wood forests, sometimes dominating the understory.



Uses: Fruit is edible. Although the berries aren't considered particularly flavourful, they have been used in the making of wine and beer in other areas.



Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*)
Photo Credit: Graham Sorenson



Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*)
Photo Credit: Graham Sorenson



Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) Photo Credit: Valerie Pelisser

Wolf-willow (*Elaeagnus commutata*)



Other names: American silverberry, silver elaeagnus, silverberry, wolfberry, grizzly berries.

Identification and habitat: Attractive shrub of open, well-drained and dry sites, gravel, and aspen forests. Grows up to 2 m tall. Branches are greyish red. Oval, silvery, leaves grow opposite one another on the stem. Flowers are yellow, funnel-shaped, and with four divisions visible. They grow at the junction where leaf meets stem. The flowers are described as smelling 'musky' or pleasant. Fruit is silver and oval in shape with a large seed inside each. Not commonly picked or used in the NWT.



Uses: Edible. Can be used in jam and has been used as a decoration. As part of the Gwich'in Traditional Caribou Skin Clothing Project (1998), one Indigenous knowledge holder noted that she had seen the seeds inside the berries being used for decoration on clothes. Traditionally prepared with moose fat for consumption. Bears may consume the berries.



Wolf-willow (*Elaeagnus commutata*) Photo Credit: Kim Poitras Wolf-willow (*Elaeagnus commutata*) Photo Credit: Phillipe Di Pizzo

Poisonous Berries

Red Baneberry (*Actaea rubra*)



Other names: Snakeberry, doll's eyes.

CAUTION: Poisonous in very small amounts in all parts of the plant, but especially in the berries and roots. Even just a couple berries could cause cramping, headaches, vomiting, or dizziness. The toxin in the plant can also cause cardiac arrest.

Identification and habitat: Grows up to 1 m tall. Stems are smooth and usually branched. Leaves grow alternately on the stem and are each divided in 2-3 parts. Leaves are obviously toothed. Flowers are white, growing in rounded clusters. The flowers look a bit fuzzy and are small enough that seeing the details is difficult. If you have a magnifying glass, you should be able to see 5-10 very thin petals. Fruit is either red or white and very shiny. It looks very much like costume jewelry. Grows in moist, shady areas and open forests.



Red Baneberry (*Actaea rubra*) Photo Credit: Jessica Smart



Red Baneberry (*Actaea rubra*) Photo Credit: Claire Singer

“There’s another berry that looks like this. They say not to eat it. I don’t know...my Grandma always used to say don’t eat that kind. Poisonous. Yeah. Usually see those in, like, they’re kind of all over the place, you know.”

— Helen, Wekweètì, 2023

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos* species)

Thin-leaved Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)



Snowberry
(*Symphoricarpos albus*)
Photo Credit: Mariame Ba

Other names: Common snowberry, northern snowberry, waxberry, white coralberry.

CAUTION: Poisonous (all parts of the plant). Although poisonous to people, these plants provide food for various birds, bears, beavers, and hares, among others.

Identification and habitat:

This shrub of aspen woods grows up to 1 m tall. The twigs are hollow and hairless. Leaves grow opposite one another on the stems and are oval in shape. Flowers are a pinkish colour and bell-shaped. Fruit is white and round.



Western Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*)



Western Snowberry
(*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*)
Photo Credit: Brian Jackson

Other names: Wolfberry.

CAUTION: Berries poisonous, causing vomiting and diarrhea. However, the berries are consumed by various birds and small mammals. May attract bees.

Identification and habitat:

Grows up to 1 m tall and has many branches. Leaves are grey green in colour and grow opposite one another on the stems. Each leaf is edged with rounded teeth. Flowers are pink and grow in clusters. Berries are greenish white but quickly turn to brown or black as the season progresses.



Wild Lily-of-the-Valley (*Maianthemum canadense*)



Other names: Canada beadruby, Canada mayflower, Canada May lily, false lily-of-the-valley, two-leaved Solomon's seal, beadruby.

CAUTION: Not considered edible. The berries may act as a laxative and heart stimulant. The fruit is, however, eaten by some birds and small mammals.

Identification and habitat: Grows 5-25 cm tall. Sometimes forms a ground cover in moist forests. Often occurs with aspen and pine trees. Leaves grow alternately on the stem and are heart-shaped or oval in appearance. Flowers are white with four segments to them (versus six segments on other species in this group). Flowers grow in clusters on the central stem of the plant. The fruit is initially green, turning red as it ripens. Grows in moist and open areas.



Wild Lily-of-the-Valley (*Maianthemum canadense*)
Photo Credit: Claire Singer



Wild Lily-of-the-Valley (*Maianthemum canadense*)
Photo Credit: Claire Singer

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