

NANNYBERRY

Viburnum lentago L.

Plant Symbol = VILE

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center & the Biota of North America Program



© R.A. Seelig
Botany Dept., NMNH, Smithsonian Institution
@ PLANTS

Alternate Names

Sheepberry, wild raisin, sweet viburnum, nannyberry

Uses

Nannyberry is a shade-tolerant, understory species useful in landscape plantings as shrub borders, taller barriers, hedges, and windbreaks. It produces good seasonal displays of flowers, fruits, and fall leaf color. The fruits are sweet and edible and are eaten by many species of birds and wildlife.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

General: Nannyberry is a native, deciduous, multi-stemmed shrub or small tree that may reach 36 ft. in height. The plant is also known as "sheepberry" because its fruit smells like wet sheep wool when over ripe. Nannyberry is leggy and somewhat open at maturity with an irregular to rounded crown. Suckers often form at the base. The bark is dark gray to black in a pattern of small blocks. Leaves are simple, opposite, and ellipse to egg-shaped with finely toothed margins. They are 2-4" long and

hairless, or nearly so, on both sides. The ½-1" petiole has a wavy, mostly winged margin. Mature foliage is dark glossy green, becoming deep maroon to red in the fall. Small, creamy-white, bisexual flowers in flat-topped clusters appear May-June. The ½" berry-like fruits (drupes) are blue-black and form hanging clusters from July - September.

Adaptation and Distribution

Nannyberry is adaptable to a wide range of sites, but is commonly found natively in moist areas with rich loam to clay-loam soil, such as low woods, swamp borders, or near stream banks. It also occurs on moist, wooded slopes, but tolerates drier sites. Although quite shade-tolerant, it achieves relatively larger size in more open areas.

Nannyberry is distributed throughout the north and northeastern United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Nannyberry seed requires alternating temperatures and a cool moist period to germinate (Dirr, 1990). The plant can be readily propagated by softwood cuttings. Hanging branches may also root, or layer, where they touch the ground. Nannyberry has fibrous roots and is easily transplanted and established.

Management

Although nannyberry grows naturally as a multi-stemmed shrub, it can be maintained as a small tree by pruning stems and removing suckers at the base.

Pests and Potential Problems

Powdery mildew, which may affect leaves in late summer, decreases aesthetic value but will not kill the plant. The viburnum leaf beetle (*Pyrrhalta viburni*), first a problem in Quebec and Ontario in 1978, has moved to New York and Maine and is now a concern in urban landscapes and nurseries. *V. lentago* leaves can be damaged or skeletonized by the adults and larvae, although *V. opulus* is the beetle's preferred host. The beetle larvae hatch in early May, feed for about 4-5 weeks then pupate in the soil. Adults emerge by mid-July, feed, mate, and lay overwintering eggs on viburnum twigs. Chemical control

is best applied to young larvae. Over-wintering eggs should be pruned out and destroyed before hatching.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Nannyberry cultivars are not readily available.

Prepared By:

Guy Nesom

Formerly BONAP, North Carolina Botanical Garden,
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North
Carolina

Kathy Davis

USDA NRCS National Plant Materials Center
Beltsville, Maryland

Species Coordinator:

Gerald Guala

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, Baton
Rouge, Louisiana

Edited: 24Jul2002 JLK: 060818.jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Read about [Civil Rights at the Natural Resources Conservation Service](#).