

## STRAWBERRY BUSH

*Euonymus americana* L.

Plant Symbol = EUAM7

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center & Addis Field Office



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### Alternate Names

wahoo, bursting heart, fish wood, burning bush, hearts-a-burstin-love, brook euonymus

### Uses

**Wildlife:** Strawberry bush seeds are reportedly consumed sparingly by wild turkey and some songbirds. Leaves are readily consumed by white-tailed deer and eastern cottontail rabbit, however, strawberry bush is not abundant enough to be recognized as important in their total diet. Strawberry bush may be considered an important indicator of deer presence because it virtually disappears in areas overstocked with deer.

**Medicinal:** The seed is a strong laxative. A tea made from the roots is used in cases of uterine prolapse, vomiting of blood, painful urination, and stomach aches. The bark is diuretic, expectorant, and tonic. It was used as a tea in the treatment of malaria, liver congestion, constipation, etc. The powdered bark, applied to the scalp, was believed to eliminate dandruff. An infusion of the plant has been used to stimulate menstruation and therefore should not be used by pregnant women.

**Ornamental:** Strawberry bush is an excellent ornamental species. The leaves turn dark red in

autumn. The red capsules and scarlet arillate seeds add to the “burning effect,” contributing to several of its common names. Strawberry bush is best used in natural settings, in the shade of larger shrubs and trees. Large specimens can have hundreds of “bursting” red capsules. In the winter, the bright green twigs are also attractive.

### 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:** Strawberry bush, family Celastraceae, is a native perennial shrub 2-6 feet high. The leaves are egg-shaped to broadly lance-shaped, usually pointed at the base and sharply pointed at the tip, finely and sharply toothed on the margin, bright green and smooth on top, slightly paler and smooth beneath, 1 to 3.5 inches long, and almost stalkless. The flowers are yellowish green or greenish purple, borne at the end of long stalks and appear from March to June. The petals are 5 in number and nearly triangular in shape. The fruits are rounded capsules with a warty surface. The capsules split open at maturity to expose bright red seeds and take on the appearance of a strawberry, ripening in September or October.

**Distribution:** Strawberry bush is Native and occurs throughout much of the Eastern United States (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia). It is also known to occur in Ontario. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

**Habitat:** Strawberry bush grows in deciduous woods, sandy thickets, swamps, woodlands, shady edges, ravines, and stream sides.

### Adaptation

Strawberry bush occurs in moist forests, including bottomland hardwood forests and adjacent to small streams. Once established, it can tolerate poor drainage or moderate droughts and alkaline terrain. However, well-drained summer irrigated beds of

humus rich soil produce better growth and fruits. Fruits grow best in partial-to-full sun, but are shade tolerant. The species spreads by animal dispersed seeds.

### **Establishment**

*Propagation by seed:* Strawberry bush seeds require three months of cold treatment to germinate. A stored seed requires 8-12 weeks warm followed by 8-16 weeks cold stratification and can be sown in cold frames. When seedlings are large enough to handle, place the seedlings into individual pots and grow them in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. Out-plant seedlings into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the danger of frost passes. Fruits only develop on 2 to 3-year-old plants. Root clumps can be divided to make more plants in the winter.

### **Management**

Strawberry bush tolerates different types of well-drained soils but does not tolerate drought well; water and mulch this plant in hot, dry environments. The species requires a site receiving partial shade and can withstand heavy pruning. No pruning is required, unless size containment is required. Strawberry bush transplants well when it is balled and burlapped. Winter is the optimum trimming time, but cutting can be done any time the plant is in leaf.

### **Pest and Potential Problems**

Strawberry bush is extremely susceptible to Euonymus scale and crown gall. Both of these problems are of considerable importance.

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

Although abundant amounts grow in the wild, the plant may require special ordering from a customer service oriented nursery.

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

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