

Common woody species of northern BC: A brief guide

May 3, 2019

Abies lasiocarpa

abilas

Common name: subalpine fir

Habitat: high-elevation, near treeline/timberline

Key characteristics: evergreen coniferous tree, stomata lines occur on both sides of needles, needles do not lie flat, cones large and point upwards,

May be confused with: *A. amabilis* (stomata lines occur only on the underside of needles, needles lie flat in one plane for this species), *Tsuga mertensiana* (in which cones small, hang down from branches)



Figure 1: *

Photo credits, from left to right: Walter Siegmund ([wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)), C.J. Earle (<https://www.conifers.org>), D. Mosquin, UBC (<https://www.iucnredlist.org>)

Acer circinatum

acegla

Common name: Vine maple

Habitat: lower altitude moist forests (at Manning Park)

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub or small tree, leaves with 7-9 lobes

May be confused with: *A. douglasii* which has leaves with 3-5 lobes and occurs at higher altitudes and latitudes



Acer glabrum

acegla

Common name: Douglass maple

Habitat: mountains, often near water or in ravines, forest edges, often in burned areas

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub or small tree, leaves with 3-5 lobes

May be confused with: *A. circinatum* which has leaves with 7-9 lobes and occurs at lower altitudes of Manning Park



Alnus incana

alninc

Common name: speckled alder, mountain alder

Synonym: *Alnus tenuifolia*

Habitat: moist forests, streamsides, bogs and fens in the montane zone

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, leaves are alternate, smooth, finely toothed 1-2 times; axillary buds rounded at the tip, on short stalks, nutlets have no or very narrow wings

May be confused with: *Alnus viridis*, *Alnus rubra* (at lower altitudes of Manning Park; a tree, has leaves with wavy margins that are slightly rolled under and have coarse blunt teeth)



Alnus rubra

alnrub

Common name: Red alder

Habitat: Moist woodlands, forests, floodplains and clearcuts in the lowland and montane zones; common in coastal BC

Key characteristics: deciduous tree, leaves alternative with coarse blunt teeth and wavy margins that are slightly rolled under, nutlets occur in cones

May be confused with: *Alnus incana* or *Alnus viridis*, which are shrubs rather than trees.



Alnus viridis

alnvir

Common name: Sitka alder

Synonym: *Alnus viridis* ssp. *sinuata*, *Alnus sinuata*

Habitat: open, full sun in moist montane woods, rocky or sandy coastlines and talus slopes, streambanks, lakeshores, and the north face of rocky outcrops.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, leaves alternative with irregularly and sharply saw-toothed margins,, axillary buds pointy and without stalks, nutlets have wide wings

May be confused with: *Alnus incana*, *Alnus rubra* (at lower altitudes of Manning Park; a tree, has leaves with wavy margins that are slightly rolled under and have coarse blunt teeth)



Amelanchier alnifolia

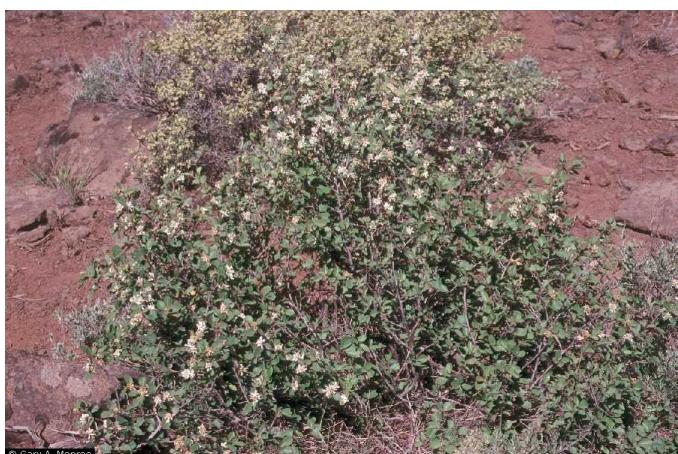
amealn

Common name: saskatoon

Habitat: open to lightly shaded disturbed sites from lower-elevation coniferous forests up to timberline.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, variable growth form: small trees growing to 7 meters high or forming thickets, mats, or clumps; leaves round, toothed, alternate; white flowers April-June; blue fruits July-August.

May be confused with: when *A. alnifolia* is small it may be confused with *Spirea*; can be distinguished by fruits, size, and leaf shape



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Betula papyrifera

betpap

Common name: paper birch

Habitat: open areas in full sun (shade intolerant)

Key characteristics: deciduous tree, white peeling bark on mature trees

May be confused with: *Alnus* spp, from which it can be distinguished by its peeling bark and sharp-pointed leaf tips



Cornus canadensis

corcan

Common name: bunchberry

Habitat: Moist to mesic forests and openings in all but the alpine zone; common throughout BC;

Key characteristics: deciduous, trailing perennial herb (5-25 cm; usually less than 15 cm tall) with a whorl of 5 leaves that have distinct Cornus parallel leaf venation, white flowers occurring in a dense cluster in the center of the leaves, surrounded by 4 white petal-like bracts; fruits are red berry-like drupes.

May be confused with: Leaves might be confused with *C. stolonifera*, which is a deciduous shrub that co-occurs with *C. canadensis* at many sites, and is 1-6m tall.



Cornus stolonifera

corsto

Common name: red-osier dogwood

Synonym: *Cornus sericea*

Habitat: common on the edges of lakes, ponds, within wetlands, and along streams.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub with stems 1-6m tall, bark and twigs are reddish to purple, fruits are white berry-like drupes, distinct Cornus parallel leaf venation

May be confused with: Leaves might be confused with *C. canadensis*, which is a low, trailing perennial herb that co-occurs with *C. stolonifera* at many sites; *C. canadensis* is 5-25 cm (usually less than 15 cm) tall.



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Corylus cornuta

corcor

Common name: beaked hazelnut

Habitat: moist sites in lowland and montane areas

Key characteristics: deciduous leaves that are typically heart-shaped at the base; nuts occur in clusters of 2-3 at the end of branches;

May be confused with: *Alnus*, from which it can be distinguished by its flowers, fruit, and which is wedge-shaped at the leaf base; two varieties of *Cornus cornuta* occur in BC: var. *cornuta* (with Involucral beaks about twice as long as the fruit; silicles thinly short-hairy; twigs sparsely hairy) and var. *californica* (not common in the east; with involucral beaks about equal in length to the fruit; silicles glabrous; twigs hairy, sometimes glandular)



Lonicera involucrata

loninv

Common name: black twin-berry, twinberry honeysuckle

Habitat: moist forests and thickets in lowlands and montane areas

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, opposite lance-shaped, pointed leaves; tubular bell-shaped, yellow flowers, in pairs; fruits are shiny black berries, occurring in pairs.

May be confused with: *L. utahensis*, which has red fruits and pale green oblong leaves with round (not pointed) tips.



Lonicera utahensis

lonuta

Common name: honeysuckle

Habitat: Moist to mesic meadows, grasslands, shrublands and open forests in the lowland, steppe and montane zones; common in SC and SE BC, rare in SW BC

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, opposite pale green oblong leaves with rounded tips; tubular bell-shaped, ?? flowers, in pairs; fruits are red berries, occurring in pairs.

May be confused with: *L. involucrata*, which has black fruits and lance-shaped pointed leaves.



Mahonia aquifolium

mahaqui

Common name: tall oregon-grape

Habitat: Mesic to dry open or closed forests.

Key characteristics: Evergreen shrub with holly-like leaflets, yellow flowers in clusters, blue fruits.

May be confused with:



Menziesia ferruginea

menfer

Common name:

Habitat: Forests in lowland, montane and subalpine areas.

Key characteristics: Leaves deciduous, alternate, clustered at stem tips, with fine-toothed margins and glandular-hairy on both surfaces, pale beneath; flowers bell-shaped and greenish-orange or dark pink with 4 lobes, in clusters; fruit a capsule.

May be confused with: *Rhododendrum albiflorum*, which has white flowers that are not bell-shaped and leaf margins that are entire or wavy, but not fine-toothed.



Oplopanax horridus

ophor

Common name: devil's club

Habitat: wet to moist streambanks and forests in the lowland to subalpine areas

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub armed with yellow spines on stem and undersides of leaves, maple-shaped leaves, fruits are clusters of red berries

May be confused with: *Rubus parviflorus* has a similar leaf shape, but no other plants are as heavily armed on stem and leaves.



Paxistima myrsinoides

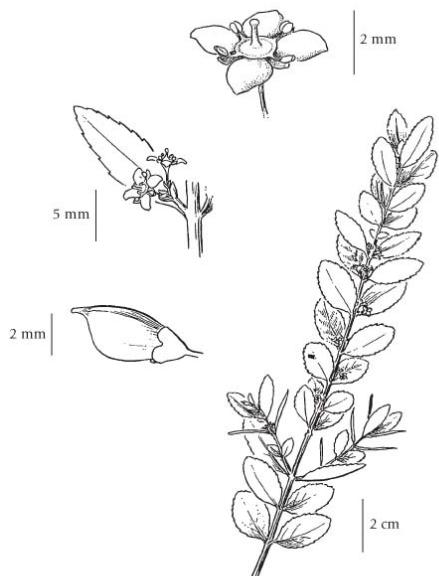
paxmyr

Common name: false-box

Habitat: mesic to dry slopes and forests in the lowland, steppe and montane zones

Key characteristics: evergreen shrub; stems reddish-brown, often 4-ridged; flowers with 4 maroon petals

May be confused with: *Shepherdia canadensis*



Paxistima myrsinoides

Picea engelmannii

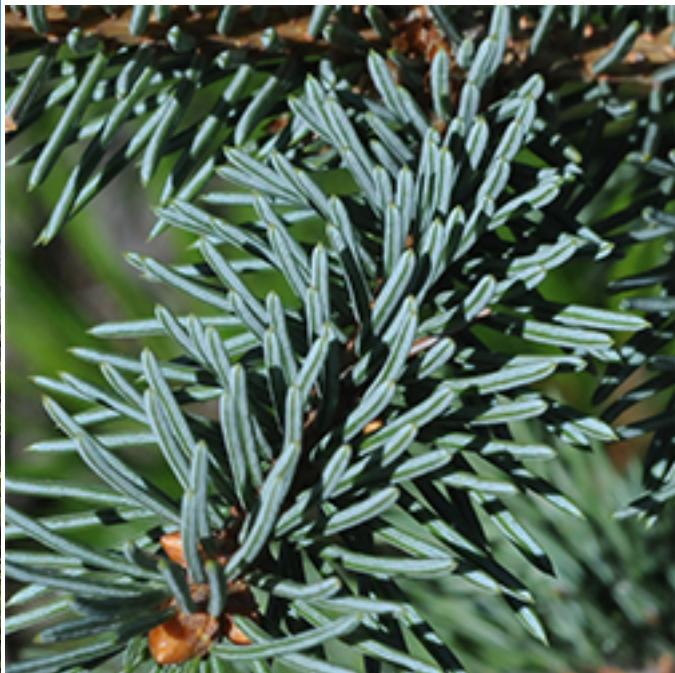
piceng

Common name: Engelmann spruce

Habitat: common at high elevations, with subalpine fir in moister areas and with lodgepole pine in drier areas

Key characteristics: evergreen coniferous tree, bluish green, 4-sided, sharp needles that spread in all directions around twigs and have two white bands of stomata on both the upper and lower surfaces; scaly bark; seed cones yellow to purplish-brown, 4-5 cm and hang from upper branches.

May be confused with: *P. glauca* (which has smaller cones- mostly 2.5-3.5 cm, and occurs at lower elevations), naturally occurring hybrid *P. engelmannii x glauca* trees not easily distinguishable from the parent species. At low elevations hybrids resemble pure *P. glauca*; pure *P. engelmannii* dominates at higher elevations.





Picea glauca

picgla

Common name: white spruce

Habitat: common at low elevations

Key characteristics: evergreen coniferous tree, needles are four-sided, sharp, and stiff, arranged spirally on twigs, whitish-green have two white bands of stomata on both the upper and lower surfaces; scaly bark; seed cones 2.5-3.5 cm;

May be confused with: *P. engelmannii* (which has larger cones- 4-5 cm, and occurs at higher elevations), naturally occurring hybrid *P. engelmannii x glauca* trees not easily distinguishable from the parent species.; hybrids at low elevations resemble pure *P. glauca*.



Pinus contorta

pincon

Common name: lodgepole pine

Habitat: common throughout BC in wet to dry bogs, lower slopes and high river terraces in the lowland, montane and subalpine zones

Key characteristics: evergreen coniferous tree, needles in bundles of 2, seed cones have scales armed with prickles at their tips.

May be confused with: *P. albicaulis* (at high latitudes of Manning Park) has needles in bundles of 5; *P. banksiana* (in which seed cones lack prickles), can hybridize with *P. banksiana*;



Populus balsamifera

popbal

Common name: balsam poplar (ssp. *balsamifera*), black cottonwood (ssp. *trichocarpa*)

Habitat: Moist uplands and floodplains in the montane zone

Key characteristics: deciduous tree; alternate leaves are shiny, dark green, and pale underneath with sharply pointed tip and fine teeth on the margins, flowers in catkins (male and female flowers on separate trees), fruit is a hairy capsule that opens to release seeds covered with white, fluffy hairs, rough bark.

May be confused with: *P. tremuloides*, which has smooth bark and flattened petioles; two subspecies occur in BC: ssp. *trichocarpa* grows west of the Rocky Mountains and ssp. *balsamifera* grows in the north, from the upper Stikine to east of the Rockies. Subspecies can hybridize where ranges overlap.



Populus tremuloides

poptre

Common name: quaking aspen

Habitat: common throughout BC in moist to dry ravines, depressions, meadows, ridges, upland forests and occasionally on floodplains in the lowland and montane zones

Key characteristics: deciduous tree, smooth bark, leaves round to heart-shaped at base with fine teeth and flattened petioles; fruit is a capsule

May be confused with: *P. balsamifera*, which has rough bark.



Prunus virginiana

pruvir

Common name: chokecherry

Habitat: common throughout BC in moist to dry ravines, depressions, meadows, ridges, upland forests and occasionally on floodplains in the lowland and montane zones

Key characteristics: Shrub or occasionally a small tree, 1-6 m tall, with smooth reddish-brown to grey-brown bark that does not peel readily and does not have prominent lenticels. Leaves: alternate, deciduous, finely and regularly saw-toothed, abruptly tapering to a sharp-pointed tip, blunt to rounded or somewhat heart-shaped at the base. Flowers white, in long bottlebrush-like clusters at the end of short leaf shoots. Fruits red, purple, or black.

May be confused with:



Rhododendron albiflorum

rhoalb

Common name: white-flowered rhododendron

Habitat: Dry to wet forests and openings in the montane and subalpine zones; common in C and S BC;

Key characteristics: leaves thin, alternate, deciduous, with fine rusty hairs on upper surfaces, and in clusters along branches, white flowers in axillary clusters of 1 to 4, fruits are brown capsules.

May be confused with: *V. membranaceum* (whose fruit is a berry, and flowers are small and bell-shaped), *Menziesia ferruginea* (which has flowers that are small and bell-shaped and leaves with fine-toothed margins and hairs on both upper and lower surfaces),



Ribes lacustre

riblac

Common name: Black gooseberry

Habitat: moist woods, swamps, streambanks, and drier forest slopes and subalpine ridges.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, 0.5-2m tall, stems are erect in sun, trailing in shade, covered with golden, bristly, prickles. Leaves are small with 5 deeply indented lobes. Small pinkish flowers in pendulous, drooping clusters of 5-15. Fruits are dark-purple with glandular hairs.

May be confused with: flowering currant (at lower altitudes in Manning Park), which lacks prickles and has a smooth stem.



Rosa acicularis

rosaci

Common name: prickly rose

Habitat: Dry to moist open forests, thickets, open rocky or grassy slopes, river terraces, streambanks and clearings in the lowland to subalpine zones; common throughout BC.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, 0.3 to 1.5 m tall, stems bristly and covered with straight, bristly prickles of various sizes flowers solitary

May be confused with: *Rosa gymnocarpa* (southern BC, flowers small and solitary), *Rosa nutkana* (coastal BC, flowers large and solitary), *Rosa woodsii* (in which flowers are usually in clusters of 3-10)



Rosa nutkana

rosnut

Common name: Nootka rose

Habitat: Mesic to moist thickets, forest edges, river terraces, shorelines, streambanks, clearings and roadsides in the lowland and montane zones; common throughout BC south of 55°N

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, flowers large and solitary

May be confused with: *R. acicularis*



Rubus idaeus

rubida

Common name: red raspberry

Habitat:

Key characteristics: leaves alternate, deciduous, pinnately compound (leaflets 3 to 5), paler beneath; flowers with 5 white petals; red berries.

May be confused with: *R. spectabilis*, which has leaves that are greenish on both surfaces and often is unarmed (though can be strongly bristly)



Rubus parviflorus

rubpar

Common name: thimbleberry

Habitat: Moist open forests, thickets, streambanks, clearings and roadsides in the lowland to subalpine zones; common throughout southern BC

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, alternate leaves, 1.5-2 m tall, inflorescence of 2 to 10 stalked, white flowers with 5 petals, maple-leaf-shaped leaves, red raspberry-like fruit. Lacks spines.

May be confused with: *Oplopanax horridus* has a similar leaf shape but is covered with spines (*R. parviflorus* is unarmed)



Rubus spectabilis

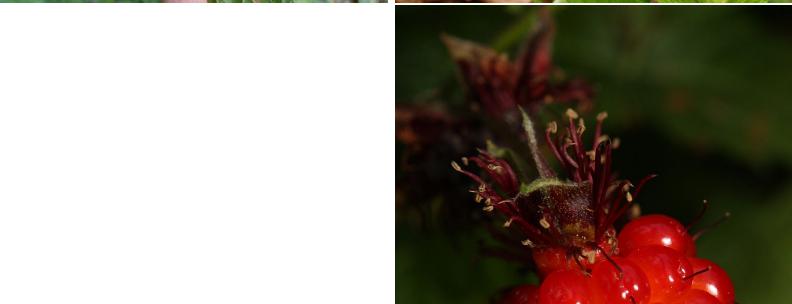
rubspe

Common name: salmon berry

Habitat: Moist to wet forests, swamps and streambanks in the lowland and montane zones

Key characteristics: leaves alternate, deciduous, pinnately compound leaves (leaflets 3 to 5) that are greenish on both surfaces, flowers with 5 pink petals; yellow-orange berries, often unarmed (though can be strongly bristly).

May be confused with: *R. idaeus*, which has leaves that are paler beneath and has white flowers and red berries



Sambucus racemosa

samrac

Common name: red elderberry

Habitat: Moist to mesic meadows, ditches, streambanks, grasslands, shrublands, disturbed areas and forests in the lowland, steppe and montane zones

Key characteristics: deciduous, large shrub, 1-6 m tall; bark dark reddish-brown, warty. Opposite, compound, pinnately divided leaves with 5-7 leaflets, often sharp-pointed at the tip and saw-toothed on the margins. White/cream flowers occur in clusters. Fruits are berry-like, shiny red (usually var. marborescens or leucocarpa) or purplish-black (var. melanocarpa), occasionally brown, yellow, or whitish. Note: there are 3 varieties: var. arborescens, var. leucocarpa, var. melanocarpa

May be confused with: Sorbus spp.



Shepherdia canadensis

shecan

Common name: soopolallie, Canadian buffalo-berry, russet buffaloberry, soapberry

Habitat: Mesic to dry sites in the lowland and steppe to subalpine zones;

Key characteristics: deciduous opposite, entire leaves; flowers with 4-lobed sepals (male and female flowers separate); bright red berries.

May be confused with: *Paxistima myrsinoides*



Sorbus scopulina

sorsco

Common name: mountain ash

Habitat: Mesic to moist glades, streambanks, forest edges and open forests in the montane and subalpine zones;

Key characteristics: Shrub, 1-5 m tall; leaves alternate, deciduous, pinnately compound with 9-13 toothed leaflets that have a sharp-pointed tip and fine teeth almost to the base. . Flowers white, small, occurring in flat-topped to rounded, branched clusters; fruits are berry-like pomes that are orange to red not glaucous,

May be confused with: *Sorbus sitchensis* (which has glaucous fruits, and leaflets that are round/blunt at the tip with coarse teeth)



Sorbus sitchensis

sorsit

Common name: mountain ash

Habitat: Mesic to moist open forests, forest edges, streambanks, rockslides, thickets and meadows in the montane to alpine zones; common throughout BC

Key characteristics: Shrub 1-4 m tall; leaves: alternate, deciduous, pinnately compound with 7-11 leaflets that are rounded to blunt at the tip, smooth above, coarsely saw-toothed for not more than 3/4 their length. Flowers small, white, occurring in half-rounded, branched clusters. Fruits are berry-like pomes that are red and glaucous.

May be confused with: *Sorbus scopulina* (which has fruits that are not glaucous and leaflets that are sharp-pointed at the tip and finely toothed almost to the base)



Spiraea betulifolia

spibet

Common name: birch-leaved spirea

Habitat: Dry to moist open forests, rocky slopes and clearings in the lowland, steppe and montane zones;

Key characteristics: deciduous low shrub, 20-60 cm tall, leaves alternate, oval to egg-shaped, coarsely double-toothed mostly above the middle, dark green above, paler below, smooth; small white to pinkish flowers in branched inflorescences; fruits are brown, leathery follicles.

May be confused with: *Spiraea douglasii* (which has pink flowers), *Spiraea pyramidalis* which is thought to be a hybrid between *S. douglasii* and *S. betulifolia*



Spiraea douglasii

spidou

Common name: Pink spirea

Habitat: Fens, swamps, bogs, streambanks, lake margins, and moist to wet thickets and open forests in the lowland and montane zones

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, alternate oblong, coarsely toothed, dark green leaves that are smooth above and paler/woolly-hairy beneath, flowers pink

May be confused with: *S. betulifolia* (which has white flowers), *S. pyramidalis* which is thought to be a hybrid between *S. douglasii* and *S. betulifolia*



Spiraea pyramidalis

spipyrr

Common name: spirea

Habitat: Dry to moist open forests, edges of forests and wetlands, thickets, gullies and clearings in the montane zone

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub,

May be confused with: *S. betulifolia* (which has white flowers), *S. betulifolia* (*S. pyramidalis* is thought to be a hybrid between *S. douglasii* and *S. betulifolia*)



Symporicarpos albus

symalb

Common name: Common snowberry

Habitat: Mesic to dry meadows, disturbed areas, grasslands, shrublands, and forests in the lowland, steppe and montane zones; extremely common in S BC, common in C BC, infrequent northward;

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, 0.5-3 m tall; older stems dark greyish-brown with shredding bark; opposite leaves with entire margins or occasionally with a few wavy teeth, flowers pink to white and bell-shaped, in short, dense clusters at ends of twigs; fruit a white berry-like drupe

May be confused with: *Lonicera utahensis*, which has red fruits that occur in pairs and pale green oblong leaves that never have teeth or lobes.



Thuja plicata

thupli

Common name: western red-cedar

Habitat: Wet to moist floodplains, river terraces and slopes, often rich with nutrients from seepage or fluvial deposits, or rich parent material, in the lowland and montane zones

Key characteristics: evergreen coniferous tree with ridged/shreddy bark that readily tearing off in long thin strips; wood aromatic; leaves are scalelike and cones are small

May be confused with: *Xanthocyperis nootkatensis* which has grayish bark that does not tear off in long thin strips and cones are round



Vaccinium membranaceum

vibmem

Common name: black huckleberry

Habitat: Dry to moist forests and openings in the montane and subalpine zones;

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, alternate, egg-shaped leaves 1.5-6 cm long, 1-3 cm wide, gradually narrowing to pointed tip, rounded to tapered at base, margins finely toothed, somewhat paler on the lower surfaces; solitary pale yellowish-pink bell-shaped flowers in leaf axils, purple edible, sweet berries without a pale bloom.

May be confused with: other *Vaccinium* spp, from which it can be distinguished by its toothed leaf margins, pointed tip and dark purple-black berries (other species have pale blue berries and smooth leaf margins).



Vaccinium ovalifolium

vacova

Common name: oval-leaved blueberry

Habitat: Mesic to wet forests and openings, and bogs in the lowland to subalpine zones; common throughout C and S BC.

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, alternate, egg-shaped leaves with smooth margins; solitary pale yellowish-pink bell-shaped flowers in leaf axils, blue edible berries with a pale bloom, berries tart

May be confused with: *V. membranaceum* (which has leaves with toothed margins and pointed tips, dark purple-black berries); *V. parviflorum* (which occurs at Manning Park, and has green stems/branches and red berries)



Vaccinium parviflorum

vacpar

Common name: red huckleberry

Habitat: Dry to moist forests and on decaying wood in the lowland and montane zones;

Key characteristics: shrub with red berries and green twigs

May be confused with: *Vaccinium* spp. (*V. parviflorum* is the only species with red berries)



Viburnum edule

vibedu

Common name: highbush-cranberry

Habitat: Wet to moist streambanks, swamps and forests in the lowland, steppe and montane zones;

Key characteristics: deciduous shrub, opposite, 3-lobed jaggedly toothed leaves; white flowers in small, compact, flat or rounded clusters of few to several; fruits are berrylike red or orange drupes, in clusters.

May be confused with:



Sources

1. E-Flora BC: Electronic Atlas of the Flora of British Columbia, <http://linnet.geog.ubc.ca>
2. Wikipedia and wikimedia commons
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