

# European Highbush Cranberry

## (*Viburnum opulus* subsp. *opulus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

This species is originally from Europe and was brought to North America for use in landscaping. It is very closely related to American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum opulus* subsp. *trilobum*), a native species which is found in moist woodlands and wetland edges. European Highbush Cranberry is a new invasive species showing a tendency to invade woodlands, near urban areas, displacing native species. Furthermore, there is a risk that the European subspecies will cross-breed with our native American subspecies, effectively driving our American subspecies to extinction.

Highbush cranberry is a shrub growing up to 12' tall with maple-like, three-lobed, leaves which are arranged opposite to each other on the stem. In the spring they have flat, platter-shaped clusters of white flowers which are about 4" wide. The flowers on the outside of these clusters have pedal-like brackets which make these flower more showy than the smaller flowers in the middle of the cluster. By autumn, clusters of red berries develop which hang on short stalks.

American highbush cranberry is almost identical to the European subspecies, though our native plants are typically shorter. The easiest way to tell them apart is to observe the glands located on the petioles (leaf stalks). On the American subspecies these glands are convex or dome-shaped, typically small, sometimes on short stalks and few in number (0-4). On the European sub-species these glands are concave, indented, and more numerous (2-8). The berries of the native subspecies are tangy, tasting somewhat like a cranberry, while the berries on the European subspecies taste bitter and acid. Birds dislike the European berries, therefore they often hang on the shrubs through winter. Additionally, the leaves of the native subspecies tend to have narrower lobes with fewer and less prominent teeth, whereas the lobes on the leaves of the European subspecies are more similar to the leaves of a maple tree, being broader with more prominent teeth. The European leaves will have oppressed (laying flat) hairs on the upper surface.



### CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** When removing saplings a sharp shovel, Parsnip Predator or a weed wrench will aid in removing the root. But consider the effects of soil disturbance and erosion when uprooting plants, especially on slopes (compared to the impacts of using herbicide). When cutting larger individuals, remember that any shrub will readily resprout if they are simply cut down. To prevent this, tie a heavy-duty black plastic bag around the stump or cover with a weighted bucket and leave in place for 2 growing seasons. Otherwise, repeated cutting of resprouts immediately after they appear will be needed for 1-3 growing seasons.

**Chemical:** The most effective way to control deciduous shrubs is to cut them as close to the ground as possible and carefully apply concentrated herbicide to the stump (Round-Up®, etc.) or an oil-based solution of triclopyr (Garlon® 4, Brush-B-Gone®). Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

### NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

American highbush cranberry (formerly known as *Viburnum opulus* var. *americanum*) should be used for landscaping purposes instead of the invasive European subspecies. If you are replacing European Highbush cranberry we do not recommend planting the native subspecies since there is a risk of confusing them with any surviving or seedling European plants, and furthermore risking that these subspecies will interbreed, diluting our native stock. In these cases, maple-leaved viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*) is an excellent alternative which differs primarily in that the berries are purplish-black in color. Other suitable native shrubs with showy spring flowers and attractive berries that feed wildlife include red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*) and common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*).



**-4**  
**Exotic**  
**Invasive**