

# 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 similar to the native American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*, AHC). They are so hard to tell apart that European Highbush Cranberry (EHC) is often sold in nurseries, and formerly by the WI DNR, labeled as American HC. Fortunately this species is not as abundant as other invasive brush species, generally invading woodlands near urban areas, displacing native species.

European HC 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 HC is almost identical to the European species, though our native plants are typically shorter (< 5') and are only found in moist woodlands and wetland edges, never in upland woodlands. The easiest way to tell them apart is to observe the glands located on the petioles (leaf stalks). On American HC these glands are convex or dome-shaped, typically small, sometimes on short stalks and few in number (0-4). On European HC these glands are concave, indented, and more numerous (2-8).

The berries of the native species are tangy, tasting somewhat like a cranberry, while the berries on the European species taste bitter and acrid. Birds dislike the European berries, therefore they often hang on the shrubs through winter.

Additionally, the leaves of the native species tend to have narrower lobes with fewer and less prominent teeth, whereas the lobes on the leaves of the European species are more similar to the leaves of a maple tree, being broader with more prominent teeth. The American leaves will have oppressed (laying flat) hairs on the upper surface, the European species will have a glossy leaf surface without hairs.



## CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** First cut the bush down, the best time of year is late spring when they have fully leaved-out (and may be flowering) as this is when the plant's energy reserves are lowest. All shrubs will resprout vigorously after cutting. Cut resprouts every 2-3 weeks, until the plant dies, which can take up to 2 years. Alternatively you could try the "buckthorn baggie" method, tying a thick black plastic around the stem or placing a weighted bucket over the stump that prevents light from reaching it. This method has a roughly 50% success rate. Small plants can be dug out with a sharp shovel.

**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:

Care should be taken when choosing stock for landscaping that American HC is selected instead of the invasive European species. If you are replacing European HC we do not recommend planting American HC since there is a risk of confusing them with any surviving or seedling European HC, and furthermore risking that these species will interbreed, diluting the genetics of our native plants. 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*), common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) and pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*).

