

Native Plants of Alaska

A guide for producing and cultivating



Bunchberry



Identification

Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*) is a member of the dogwood family. This perennial ground cover grows up to 8-inches high, with woody stem bases and four to seven leaves in a whorled pattern at the stem tip. Small white to yellowish flowers form in four white to greenish bracts. Clusters of up to 10 red berries, 5/16-inch in size, ripen mid-summer through fall (Pojar 1994; Viereck 1972).

Habitat

In Alaska, bunchberry is commonly found in maritime forests, Interior spruce forests, meadows and bogs (Viereck 1972).

Cultivation and Use

Bunchberries' attractive flowers, berries and foliage give the plants ornamental value, but the plant is also an important food source for deer, moose, birds and other small mammals (Crane 1989). As far as ground cover, Bunchberry is best used in shaded areas or under shrubs with acidic and moist soils (Kruckeberg 1996).



Propagation

Bunchberry fruits were collected locally in late summer and then washed, mashed and soaked for 24 hours. The seeds were separated from the mashed pulp. To overcome the *Cornus canadensis* seed's dormancy period, use stratification. The process involves mixing seeds with one part vermiculite and three parts peat and placing in a labeled plastic bag, preferably a loosely tied thin one. Next, store the bag in a moderately warm place for 45 days, turning frequently to aerate. Last, refrigerate for 140 days, keeping material moist and aerated (Flessner 2003).

Seeds were planted in flats filled with a three peat: one vermiculite media. Seeds sown onto media with 1/4-inch top dressing yielded best results, instead of 1/2-inch as directed in Flessner's protocol. Seedlings were then planted into Sunshine # 1 potting mix and the flats placed in a hotbed for eight weeks. Over-wintering in a shaded cold-frame followed.

Bunchberry is clonal, with rhizomes spreading from the parent plants close to the soil surface or within organic matter (Crane 1989). Seed propagation works better than rhizome propagation (Kruckeberg 1996).

2004 Trials (Flessner 2003)

Plant Material: seed. **Collection Date/Location:** 2003, Sitka Experiment Station.

Seed treatment: soak 24 hours.

Stratification media: 3:1 peat: vermiculite.

Stratification: warm moist 40 days/cold moist 140 days.

Viability Test: 32 seeds on paper towel for 14 days. 23 or 72% germinated.

Media: Sunshine #1.

Fertilizer: ¼ tsp. Osmocote per plug.

Unit: 2-inch plugs, 32 plugs/tray.

Sowing method: One tray sown with three seeds/plug and no stratification media with a peat top dressing depth of ½ inch.

The other sown with ¼ tsp. of stratified media/seed mix per plug and ¼-inch peat dressing. Trays covered with plastic until germination occurred. After eight weeks the ¼-inch top dressing tray was thinned and transplanted. The ½-inch dressing did not germinate well (0-1 seeds/plug).

Maintenance: hotbed eight weeks, shaded cold frame and then over-wintered in raised bed.

Survival: 95 plants.

Location: planted spring 2005 in demonstration bed with peat/sand/compost.

Note: formed rhizomes in fall 2005.

2004 Trials (Kruckeberg 1996; Macdonald 2002)

Plant Material: rhizome.

Number: 9. **Date Collected:** 5/31/04.

Rooting unit: plastic bin 21- x 16.75- x 6-inches deep with drainage holes.

Rooting Hormone: Hormodin 2 IBA (0.3% indole-3-butyric acid) powder.

Media: 50:50 sand:perlite.

Maintenance: hotbed eight weeks.

Potting Unit: 4-inch square containers. **Number of plants potted:** eight.

Media: two parts Nature potting mix: one part sand, amended with less than one part perlite and vermiculite.

Fertilizer: 1/4 tsp. Osmocote per container.

Survival: three.

Location: planted spring 2005 in demonstration bed with peat/sand/compost, Sitka.

Note: flowering and fruiting occurred in fall 2005.

References:

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For additional information contact the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service office or
Robert F. Gorman, Professor/Resource Development Agent at 907-747-9413 or e-mail: rfgorman@alaska.edu. These
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