

Bunchberry Dogwood

Cornus canadensis L.

The smallest member of the dogwood family, Bunchberry Dogwood is a slow-growing perennial that grows to about 8 inches tall. It has the classic dogwood leaf and flower, except in miniature....whorls of shiny green, broad, pointed leaves; and tiny clusters of greenish-yellow flower heads surrounded by white bracts that are often mistaken for petals.



The above-ground stems are slender and unbranched, rising from slender creeping rhizomes that are ½ to 2 inches deep in the soil. The rhizomes develop woody growth rings. Specimens have been found which are over 15 feet long and 36 years old!

Bunchberry Dogwood often covers the ground in a carpet of green, which is quite lovely when in bloom from early May through July. Later in summer, orange-red berries (actually drupes) form in tight bunches....hence the plant's common name. In fall, the leaves turn yellow to orange to a beautiful burgundy-red.

Often inhabiting coniferous forests, the Bunchberry Dogwood needs partial shade and cool, moist, acidic soils. It is sometimes found growing in rotting "nurse logs" or in mossy joints of tree branches, which may help its roots find compatible fungus. The plant is native throughout most of Canada and the northern tier of the United States, pushing south along mountain ranges. It is also found in northeastern Asia.

Largely self-sterile, this plant depends on pollinators for sexual reproduction, including bumblebees, solitary bees, beesflies, and syrphid flies. Song and game birds are the main dispersal agents of the seeds, often consuming the fruit during their fall migration. The plant is important forage for many ungulates such as white-tailed deer, mule deer and moose. Chipmunks, martens, and rabbits feed on bunchberry stems and fruits. Bear eat the fruit.

Bunchberries are edible by humans and were eaten by Native Americans. While some people consider the berries mealy and tasteless, others enjoy the juicy fruit in jam or as trail nibble. New England colonists found that adding a few bunchberries to pudding would help it jell....Evidently the little berry has a good dose of pectin in it.

Bunchberry Dogwood has been called the "fastest moving plant in the world." Its stamens are like miniature catapults that eject pollen to 10 times the height of the plant, so that the pollen can be carried on the wind. The "catapulting" motion takes place in less than half a millisecond, moving at 22 feet per second.

Because of low germination and seedling survival rates, Bunchberry Dogwood is most easily propagated by division. Take the plant with its roots along with some surrounding soil. Mulch with peat moss or pine needles. Water thoroughly during dry periods.

For more information and photos:

<http://uswildflowers.com/detail.php?SName=Cornus%20canadensis>

<http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/shrubs/cornuscan.html>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/forb/corcan/all.html>