

## European highbush cranberry *Viburnum opulus*

### Identification:

**Adoxaceae (Musk-root family)**

**Common** Perennial shrub, deciduous **Height:** 4-12' **Width:** 4-10' **Leaf Arrangement:** opposite  
**Flower:** White **Blooms:** Late spring to Early **Fruit:** red drupe **Fall Color:** Red, Burgundy

European highbush cranberry (EHC) is a shrub growing up to 12' tall with leaves which are arranged opposite to each other on the stem. In late-spring they have flat clusters of white flowers which are 4-6" across. The flowers on the perimeter 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.

Our native American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*, AHC) is extremely similar to EHC, there are several ways to tell them apart: Our native plants are smaller (typically < 5') and will be found near water or wetlands. A key ID feature are the glands located on the petioles (leaf stalks). On AHC these glands are convex or dome-shaped, sometimes on short stalks, and few in number (0-4). On EHC these glands are concave, roughly ear-shaped, and more numerous (2-8). The leaves of the native species typically have only 3 lobes (sometimes 5) with smoother margins, fewer and less prominent teeth. EHC leaves typically have 5 lobes (sometimes 3), and look similar to the leaves of a sugar or red maple trees, being broader with more prominent teeth. 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.



## European highbush cranberry

*Viburnum opulus*



**AKA: *Viburnum opulus* subsp. *opulus*, *Viburnum trilobum*, guelder-rose**

### Description & Impact:

This species 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, labeled as AHC.

EHC has spread widely throughout a variety of natural areas, being often found in both woodlands and open fields. Though it is rarely as aggressive or abundant as other invasive shrubs such as buckthorn or honeysuckle, it still contributes to the mass of invasive shrubs impacting our natural areas. The fact that the fruit is virtually unusable to birds is a good example of how non-native plants that escape into our environment don't provide the resources wildlife need, and take of growing space that would be better utilized by native plants that would feed songbirds, gamebirds and pollinators.

### Control Methods:

**Organic:** First cut the bush down, the best time of year is late spring when they have fully leaved-out and 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.

**Revegetation Recommendations:** 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*).

### Citations: