

# Naturalist Notebook

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## **Highbush Cranberry Viburnum** *Viburnum opulus*.L. Ait (formerly known as *Viburnum trilobum*)

I think most everyone would agree that fall is the best season of Minnesota. It reminds us of cozy times curled up with a blanket and a warm drink, cool mornings and warm sunny days, a season of spices and wondrous beauty. The leaves will be turning soon and the fall harvest is underway. In this edition of naturalist notebook, I'll be highlighting the Highbush Cranberry shrub that provides great fall color, privacy, and edible fruit for both people and wildlife alike.

Highbush cranberry is a native shrub that features small leaves, about 2-4 inches long with a simple 3-lobed shape. They are glossy dark green in appearance in the summer and bring forth a brilliant yellow-red or purple-red fall color. Leaves are arranged opposite each other. It grows 8-15 ft tall and 8-10ft wide and can be used as a naturalized hedge screen. Hardiness zones range from 2-7.

Although, not a true cranberry bush, highbush cranberry is edible and can be used to make sauces, jams, and jellies among other things or be eaten raw. The fruit, or drupe, only 1/3 of an inch, ripens from August to September and is at its best after a light frost before it fully ripens. Like a cranberry, the taste is tart and slightly acidic. The fruit contains one or more seeds in the center. However, make sure you purchase the American variety and not the European variety as the fruit of the European shrub is inedible and bitter.

Highbush cranberry would be an excellent choice for any bird lover. Wildlife, especially birds love to feed on the fruit that lasts well into winter when food is more scarce. Another added benefit includes being a self-pollinating plant meaning this shrub doesn't require another shrub to pollinate the flat-top, white flowers that bloom in June. Each flower bears both male and female parts and are pollinated by wind or insects.

Look for highbush cranberry in its fall glory here at River Bend as you stroll along our winding trails, but we ask that the fruit not be harvested as it helps feed our wildlife. We have a saying here that we encourage everyone follow, "What lives here, grows here, dies here, stays here". Please keep this in mind as you walk or bike and enjoy the nature center. We want everyone to experience the same natural beauty.

