

Juniperus communis L.

Standardized Common Name: Juniper

Other Common Names: Common Juniper, Horse Savin

Family: Cupressaceae

Taxonomy: *Juniperus* is a gymnosperm, so does not have true flowers (the ovules are not enclosed within an ovary, and the “fruit” is really a fleshy cone). The genus, which is widespread in cooler parts of the Northern Hemisphere and extends into Africa and the West Indies, includes about 50 species. These are divided into two major groups, one with scale-like leaves and one with needle-like leaves. *Juniperus communis* belongs to the latter group. It is widely distributed in North America and Eurasia, and is often cultivated. Its fruits are also used to flavor gin.

Description: Low spreading shrub or occasionally a small tree, trunk to 0.2 m in diameter at base, branching close to the ground, with an open crown. Bark thin, dark reddish-brown, forming long papery scales. Leaves needle-shaped, in whorls of 3, spreading, 7–12(–23) mm long, somewhat triangular in cross-section, the upper surface concave with a white streak. Usually dioecious; both male and female cones solitary. Male cones 4–5(–8) mm long, yellow, with scales bearing pollen sacs. Female cones composed of 3(–4) fleshy ovule-bearing scales, almost spherical, initially green, maturing in three growing seasons. Mature cone almost spherical to shortly cylindrical, 5–10 mm in diameter, blue to black, 1–3-seeded, surface glabrous.

Parts in Commerce: Small fleshy cone (“berry”)

Identification:

- Almost spherical, (5–)6–9(–10) mm in diameter
- Blue-black to brownish black, with faint waxy white coating most easily seen in fresh material
- When dried, surface irregular with few large depressions
- Base with two whorls of 3 tiny appressed scales (if not lost) and stub or scar of peduncle; scales tan, pointed
- Curved outlines of fleshy scales that form cone may be seen as 3 furrows at apex
- Flesh yellowish-brown
- Seeds 3 (rarely 2 or even 1)
- Seeds 2–3 mm long, brown, more or less triangular, with acute apex
- Odor aromatic
- Taste pleasant, aromatic, slightly bitter, reminiscent of turpentine

Adulterants: Other species of *Juniperus* are occasionally substituted, especially in Europe where more species of needle-leaved junipers are present. All likely potential contaminants differ from the official material in at least one of the following ways:

- Larger or smaller than expected
- Color reddish brown
- Seeds 4 or more, or 3 and fused into a single unit
- Seeds 4 mm long or more

References:

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