

# *Vaccinium macrocarpon* Aiton

**Standardized Common Name:** Cranberry

**Other Common Names:** American Cranberry,  
Large Cranberry

**Family:** Ericaceae

**Taxonomy:** *Vaccinium* includes about 450 woody species, found almost worldwide and in a variety of habitats. Many have edible fruits. *Vaccinium macrocarpon* is native to eastern North America; it has been naturalized in Europe, where it is frequently cultivated. It is classified within Sect. *Oxycoccus*. Synonyms include *Oxycoccus macrocarpus* (Aiton) Pers., *V. oblongifolium* (Michx.) Hort. ex Dunal, *V. oxycoccus* var. *oblongifolium* Michx., and *V. propinquum* Salisb.

**Description:** Shrub or vine with trailing, flexible woody stems, erect shoots to 15 cm high. Leaves evergreen, subsessile, alternate, elliptical, 7–18 mm long, 3–5 mm broad, thick-textured; apex and base rounded to obtuse; margins slightly revolute; upper surface shiny dark green, lower surface pale and glaucous. Inflorescence an intercalary, bracteate raceme; flowers on slender pedicels 2–3 cm long, subtended by 2 leaflike bracteoles arising on pedicel more than halfway to flower. Calyx fused into a cup, with 4 tiny lobes; petals 4, white to pink, fused only at base, the lobes 6–10 mm long, lanceolate, reflexed at flowering; stamens 8, filaments ciliate, anthers protruding from center of flower in a narrow cone shape, dehiscent by pores; ovary inferior. Fruit a berry, globose to ovate or elliptical, red, 9–14(–20) mm in diameter, 4-loculed; mature seeds several to 30 or more, ca. 2 mm long.

**Parts in Commerce:** Fruit

## **Identification:**

- Fleshy berry, red at maturity
- 9–14(–20) mm in diameter, broadly ellipsoid to obovate or globose
- Brownish circular region at apex with small round scar in center where floral parts were attached and 4 flattened calyx lobes arising at edges; calyx lobes small, triangular, rounded
- 4-loculed
- Maturing seeds several to 30, usually over a dozen; small undeveloped seeds may also be present
- Seeds ca. 2 mm long, somewhat asymmetrical, with raised netted ornamentation
- Taste sour, characteristic

***Vaccinium oxycoccus* L.:** “Cranberry” is recognized as referring to the two closely related species *V. macrocarpon* and *V. oxycoccus*. However, in commercial cranberry production, *V. oxycoccus* is considered to be an inferior substitute for the preferred *V. macrocarpon*. The fruits of *V. oxycoccus* are smaller, usually 6–12 mm in diameter, globose to pear-shaped and often white-speckled, especially before ripening. They usually contain fewer than a dozen seeds, each ca. 1 mm long.

## **References:**

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