

Vaccinium myrtillus L.

Standardized Common Name: Bilberry

Other Common Names: Dwarf Bilberry, European Blueberry, Huckleberry, Mountain Bilberry, Whortleberry

Family: Ericaceae

Taxonomy: *Vaccinium* includes about 450 woody species, found almost worldwide and in a variety of habitats. Many have edible fruits. *Vaccinium myrtillus* is widely distributed in northern Eurasia, with disjunct populations in western North America; it is one of 8 species native to Europe. It is classified within Sect. *Myrtillus*, most species of which are North American. Hybridization with *V. vitis-idaea* L. (Lingonberry) occurs, although the two species are not considered to be closely related.

Description: Rhizomatous colonial shrub; stems erect, to 45(–60) cm high, branching; young twigs 3-angled, wiry, green. Leaves deciduous, alternate, sessile, ovate to elliptical, (10–)19–30 mm long, 6–11(–18) mm broad, thick-textured; apex broadly acute to obtuse; base rounded; margins shallowly serrate; lower surface glandular-pubescent. Flowers axillary, single or sometimes paired, pedicellate. Calyx fused into small cup appearing continuous with pedicel, with (4–)5 tiny lobes or wavy margin; corolla greenish pink to whitish and waxy, fused into globose tube 3–6 mm long with small mouth bearing (4–)5 tiny lobes; stamens (8–)10, filaments glabrous; ovary inferior. Fruit a berry, globose with flattened apex, purplish black, sometimes glaucous, (6–)7–9(–10) mm in diameter, (4–)5-loculed; mature seeds several to 30 or more, ca. 1 mm long.

Parts in Commerce: Fruit or leaves

Identification:

Fruit

- Fleshy berry, bluish or purplish black at maturity, occasionally waxy
- 6–10 mm in diameter, globose
- Apex flattened, with large round scar marking attachment of floral parts
- Flesh purplish
- Locules (4–)5, developed seeds usually 10–30; small undeveloped seeds also present
- Seeds ca. 1 mm long, somewhat asymmetrical, one side flattened, with raised netted ornamentation
- Taste slightly acid but sweet

Leaves

- Ovate to elliptical, (1–)2–3 cm long, mostly <12(–18) mm broad
- Texture more or less leathery
- Base rounded; petiole very short to absent
- Apex broadly acute to obtuse
- Margin shallowly serrate with several teeth per side, not revolute; teeth bearing stalked glands
- Venation with conspicuous midrib; secondary veins weak, straight, terminating before margins and their ends connected by curved veins that form a scalloped line inside margins; higher-order venation netted
- Lower surface green, glandular-pubescent, without prominent black projections
- Taste weakly bitter, astringent

Adulterants: *Vaccinium uliginosum* L., also called bilberry or alpine or bog bilberry, is reported as an adulterant of the fruit. The fruit is blue to blue-black and waxy; it is slightly smaller, 6–8 mm in diameter, usually with 4 locules and 6–18 maturing seeds. Leaves are also smaller than typical of *V. myrtillus* and have entire margins and pale waxy undersides; they may be broadly obovate to nearly round, with rounded apices and broadly tapering bases. Other species previously reported as contaminants of the leaves can be distinguished by absence of the positive characters mentioned.

References:

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- Vander Kloet SP. *The Genus Vaccinium in North America*. Ottawa: Research Branch, Agriculture Canada; 1988.
- Vander Kloet SP, Dickinson TA. The taxonomy of *Vaccinium* section *Myrtillus* (Ericaceae). *Brittonia*. 1999;51:231–254.
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