Sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) is a hardy, deciduous shrub, with yellow or orange berries, native to temperate areas of Asia and Europe. Natural stands of the plant are found on coastal dunes and river banks along the Baltic coast of Finland, Poland, and Germany, the western coast of Sweden, and widely distributed throughout the Himalayan regions of India, Bhutan and Nepal and northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is now being cultivated on the Canadian plains. This article examines the versatile sea buckthorn, a plant with agricultural and medicinal uses.

A six to fourteen feet tall shrub, sea buckthorn rapidly develops an extensive root system, making it a perfect plant for preventing soil erosion, especially on fragile slopes. Its symbiotic association with actinomycetes (a bacteria commonly found in soil) helps it to fix nitrogen and buckthorn roots can transform insoluble organic and mineral matter to more soluble states, improving substandard soils. Although the plant is drought tolerant, it requires 16 to 24 inches of rain for best production of fruit. Sea buckthorn can be propagated by seed, soft or hardwood cuttings, layering and suckers. The plant depends on wind for pollination.

Sea buckthorn fruit is rich in carbohydrates, protein, organic acids, amino acids, and vitamins. It is especially rich in vitamins C and E and carotenoids. Vitamin C concentration varies according to species and habitat, but can contain 360 mg/100 g of berries (compared to the 50 mg/100 g of orange). Fatty acid and vitamin E content of sea buckthorn are higher than wheat, safflower, maize or soybean.

More than 10 different drugs have been developed from sea buckthorn in Russia and China, where it is approved for clinical use. The most important functions of sea buckthorn oil are to reduce inflammation, relieve pain, promote regeneration of tissue, and disinfect bacteria. Medications made from the plant are used for treating oral, vaginal, and rectal mucositis (inflammation of the mucous membrane), cervical erosion, radiation...
damage, burns, scalds, duodenal ulcers, chilblains (inflammation of the skin from exposure to cold), skin ulcers caused by malnutrition, and other skin damage. Sea buckthorn has also shown anti-tumor properties in research in Russia and China. —Leela Devi, MSN, RN