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Highbush cranberries

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Highbush Cranberries

***Viburnum opulus* var. *americana* (formerly *Viburnum trilobum*)**

Highbush cranberries (also known as American cranberrybush) are in the same family as elderberries. The size and color of the fruit are the only thing this species shares in common with commercial cranberries, *Vaccinium macrocarpon*.

Bushes grow to 15 feet tall and become rather formal and rounded in shape. They make a great hedge or privacy screen. The flowers are very small, white, and borne in large terminal cymes that are 3 to 4 inches across, similar to other ornamental Viburnums. The fruits are 3/8 inches in diameter, showy red and very persistent, remaining on the bushes well after frost and brightening the winter landscape. Harvest fruits in late summer or fall to avoid astringency. Freezing and thawing softens the fruits, which are seldom eaten by birds. Use fruits in jelly, preserves or sauces.

Growing highbush cranberries

Highbush cranberries are very winterhardy, growing in Zones 2 to 7. They are easy to transplant, grow in both sun and part shade, and perform well on a wide range of soils. They tend to decline if subjected to too much moisture stress. Bushes require pruning only when they

become overgrown. Make thinning cuts to remove larger, older stems at the base, and remove broken branches.

Most highbush cranberries are sold simply as the species, but some cultivars are available. 'Wentworth', 'Andrews', and 'Hahs' were selected for their high quality fruit.

Viburnum opulus, the European cranberry bush, is similar in appearance, but has astringent fruits with large seeds and high acidity, and is plagued by aphids. If you intend to eat the fruit, make sure that you only grow *Viburnum opulus* var. *americana*. You will often see it sold under its old name, *Viburnum trilobum*.

Pests

Usually not a problem, except that bushes are among the Viburnums most susceptible to the Viburnum leaf beetle, which has recently spread across much of Upstate New York, and seems poised to move into the Hudson Valley. For more information, see [Viburnum Leaf Beetle Citizen Science](#).

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