

SHRUBS FOR WILDLIFE

by J. R. Irwin

This is an odd thing for a retired forester to be writing, but it hopes to answer a common question that a forester runs into. Many people have an interest in encouraging wildlife on their properties. One way to do this is to plant shrubs that provide food in the summer, or over the winter months. Native species are preferred. Although in the past, some exotic species were used, some of these have since been classified as "invasive exotics". One example is the olive species, *Eleagnus*, both Russian olive and autumn olive, which are not now recommended. The following list provides some suggested species.

With some exceptions, this summary does not attempt to describe or identify the species listed here. Two suggestions for tree and shrub identification, that are useful are: *Trees in Canada*, by John Laird Farrar, Published by Fitzhenry and Whiteside and the Canadian Forestry Service, 1995, and *Shrubs of Ontario*, by James H. Soper and Margaret L. Heimburger, published by the Royal Ontario Museum, 1990.

Serviceberry or Juneberry *Amelanchier arborea*, *Amelanchier canadensis*

This shrub is visible along woodlot edges and fencerows in the spring as it blooms with a showy white flower. It blooms within a week or so of chokecherry, so don't confuse the two. It is much preferred by a variety of wildlife, so much so, that the berries are difficult to collect, as they are eaten as they ripen in early and mid summer. It prefers dry or moist sites on loams or silt loams, and usually occurs in open areas along woodlot edges, rather than under shade. Just about everything that flies or walks on two legs or four will eat either the berries, buds, bark, or twigs.

Fly Honeysuckle, *Lonicera canadensis*

There are numerous native honeysuckles in Ontario that are utilized by wildlife. The fly honeysuckle is usually found on moist soils around swamps or bogs, on imperfectly or poorly drained soils of a variety of textures. The honeysuckle previously planted was *Lonicera tatarica*, a Eurasian variety, commonly planted as a landscape species. Most biologists and foresters would prefer that the native honeysuckle be planted. Many species of songbirds feed on the honeysuckle berries, particularly when berries stay on the shrub over the winter. Deer, rabbits and mice will also feed on twigs and bark. This species is also a prolific nectar producer for bees and butterflies.

Highbush cranberry *Viburnum trilobum*

This is one of those species that has gotten a bad name, because it is often confused with the European variety *Viburnum opulus*, which is commonly planted as an ornamental, and has been mistakenly planted in the wild. Whereas the native fruit is sweet and edible, the European variety is bitter and remains on the shrub. One method of differentiating them is that the European variety has "saucer shaped" glands at the base of the leaf where it joins the petiole, whereas the native shrub has "club shaped" glands.

Viburnum trilobum is found across Canada on a variety of soils and sites. Although it will grow under shade, it will produce more fruit in the open. This species has a moderate use by wildlife, often being utilized later in the winter when the berries have been frozen and thawed. Ruffed grouse, brown thrasher, waxwings, red squirrels and deer will use it.

Nannyberry *Viburnum lentago*

This viburnum, as well as maple leaf viburnum, *Viburnum acerifolia*, are used much more readily than highbush cranberry, although not as much as some other wildlife species. They are commonly found on a variety of moist soils across Ontario, preferring sunny sites for the most productivity. They are utilized by: ruffed grouse, pheasant, turkey, cardinal, flycatcher, robin, starling, cedar waxwing and pileated woodpecker. Foxes, rabbits, skunks, squirrels, chipmunks, mice and deer will also use them.

Red Osier Dogwood, *Cornus stolonifera* and Gray Dogwood, *Cornus racemosa*

Like, serviceberry, these two species are the wildlife jackpot. Over 93 species of birds and wildlife will use them, from songbirds to moose. They will grow on a variety of sites, including wet, swampy sites, and are useful for flood plain planting and for stream bank stabilization. They will also form thickets which provide cover for grouse and woodcock.

Black Elderberry *Sambucus canadensis*

There are unfortunately two "black" elderberries. *Sambucus nigra* is a European variety, whereas *Sambucus canadensis* is native. Strangely enough, although the fruit of *S. canadensis* is black, it can also be called white elderberry. There is also the red elderberry, *S. pubens*, which, although native, is not as usable for wildlife, as the red fruit is not considered as palatable.

The easiest way to tell the two native elderberries apart is to look at the pith or the soft central part of the twig. The black (white) elderberry has a white pith, while the red elderberry has an orange pith. They will grow on a variety of sites, preferring moist soils rather than too dry, or too wet. The black (white) elderberry is preferred by too many species to list here. It, like serviceberry, is often difficult to collect, as it is often eaten during the summer before it is ripe.

Hawthorne *Crataegus spp.*

The hawthornes are one of those nasty little species with thorns. There are 30 species native to Canada which are common to abandoned farmland and pastures, along streams, and in forest openings. They will occupy a variety of soils, particularly those high in calcium. As they hybridize prolifically, and even reproduce without pollenization (called apomixis), they are difficult to separate into specific species. There are also two introduced species often planted. Although the fruit is not used as extensively as some other shrubs, it does form a useful site for nesting. Grouse, pheasants, turkeys, grosbeaks, waxwings, will utilize fruit and buds, and small mammals will also use the fruit.

Hawthorne is not a species to be intermixed with red cedar (*Juniperus*), as it is the alternate host for Juniper rust, commonly called "cedar apple rust". This forms a waxy, runny mess on the twigs of the cedar, followed by a large knot on the twig.

Staghorn Sumac *Rhus typhina*

This shrub forms large colonies on a variety of soils, even poor infertile soils. It reproduces by root suckers, which is fortunate, because seed is difficult to germinate. Since seed must pass through a bird before germinating, seed at the nursery is either treated with acid, or boiled before planting. The species can therefore be spread easily by digging up root sections or a root sprout, and replanting them. This is one of those species that is not a preferred food like serviceberry, elderberry, or dogwood, but it is an important winter food when others are gone. For this reason, it is used by numerous game birds, song birds, and mammals from cottontails to moose.

Raspberry *Rubus spp.*

When talking about wildlife food, one must not forget the lowly raspberry or blackberry, and all its relatives. These species will grow on a variety of soils, preferring open areas such as fence rows and the edges of woodlots. The list of species that uses them would fill up one of these

pages, so they will not be listed. They are, however, one of the easiest ways to improve habitat, and can also be used for ground cover on extremely poor, or unstable sites.

Chokecherry *Prunus virginiana*

Often derided as a weed species by foresters, this cherry is a useful wildlife species. It prefers moist sites and is relatively intolerant of shade, although it is often found as a stunted understory species. Therefore it does well on the edge of woodlots or along fence lines. This species is useful to over 70 species of birds, as well as small mammals that eat the fruit after it falls.

Pin Cherry *Prunus pensylvanica*

Pin cherry is commonly found in cutover or burnt areas, hence it is called fire cherry. It is shade intolerant and will regenerate from seed, which survives for decades on the forest floor, or from root suckers. It grows on a variety of sites, but prefers moist sites, and is used by up to 50 species of birds, as well as small mammals.

The cherries can be separated by leaves and twigs:

Black Cherry, *Prunus nigra*, the timber tree – leaves with teeth curved inward, blunt buds two toned; brown tip with a green base.

Choke Cherry, - leaves with teeth out-turned, buds sharp, two toned; dark brown tip with a light brown base.

Pin Cherry, - leaves slimmest of the three, teeth minute, buds small and rounded, clustered at the end of the twig. Lenticels (small horizontal rough patches on the bark) produce an orange powder when the twig is rubbed.

Ninebark *Physocarpus opulifolius*

This species will grow on very dry, sandy or gravelly soils, and is also at home along wetlands, streams, or lakes. The fruit is a pod containing a seed, which persists on the shrub over the winter. It is therefore planted to provide food for game birds and songbirds after other fruit is used up. It is most easily identified by the older bark which peels and comes loose in strips.