
Wildflower Spot – October 2013

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

RED CHOKEBERRY

Aronia arbutifolia

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This native deciduous shrub of the Rose Family is truly a four-season plant. In the spring clusters of flowers with 5 petals and about 20 stamens appear, borne on hairy stalks. After the flowers, abundant glossy red fruits are densely crowded along the branches. The fruits ripen in late summer and persist throughout fall and into winter. With a low protein content, they are usually overlooked by birds until the end of the season when other foods are unavailable. Leaves are glossy and dark green, to 3 inches long, minutely toothed on the margins and fuzzy, grayish-green beneath. The foliage turns bright red in autumn, similar to that of burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*).

Red Chokeberry is easily grown in average, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade, with best fruit production in full sun. It is multi-stemmed, and will form small colonies from rhizomes. The plant will tolerate a range of conditions including boggy soils. Growing in thickets, bogs, swamps and wet woods, it occurs in every county in Virginia. The range is from Newfoundland to Florida and Texas, especially on and near the Coastal Plain, but also in the mountains, to Kentucky and West Virginia.



Blooms March-May; fruits September-November.

Although the fruits can make tasty jams and jellies, this plant is known as “Chokeberry” because the berries are tart, bitter, and very astringent, causing choking if eaten. (Choke Cherry [*Prunus virginiana*] is a common, true cherry with stone fruits.) Red Chokeberry also appears in references as: *Pyrus arbutifolia* or *Photinia pyrifolia*, emphasizing its close relationship with Wild Crabapples (*Pyrus*) or as *Sorbus arbutifolia*, to the Mountain-ashes. ❖

Photo: Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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