

***Actaea rubra*, Baneberry**

General Botanical Characteristics

Actaea rubra is commonly known as baneberry because of its poisonous berries. Baneberry is most often recognized by its scarlet red berries, but it also produces snow white berries. Baneberry is a perennial herb with a thick root stock buried in the soil. It frequently grows in moist micro-sites where fire severity and frequency may be lower. While survival is better in the shade, seedlings in the sun are slightly larger and have more biomass allocated to roots.



Seasonal Development

Baneberry blooms in late May to mid-June. It is pollinated by a variety of insects. Baneberry can be self-fertile. Its seeds require a dormant period and usually take 2 years to germinate in the wild.

Distribution/Habitat

Baneberry grows in moist woods in the northern temperate zone of North America and Eurasia. Seedling growth is good in both sun and shade. Seedlings begin to bloom in their third year. The seeds are dispersed by birds and small mammals. Chipmunk may bury the seed.

Interesting Facts

- Native Americans in Alberta and British Columbia used a weak decoction made from the roots as a stimulant in treating colds, arthritis, syphilis, rheumatism, and emaciation. They also chewed leaves and put them on boils and wounds to stimulate blood flow.
- Berries are eaten by many small mammals and birds.

References

US Forest Service Fire Effects Database, November 2002,
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<http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/herbs/>.

Photo from Lynn Overtree, CalFlora Plant Database, November 2002,
<http://elib.cs.berkeley.edu/photos/>.