



EDIBLE AND POISONOUS BERRIES OF SHRUBS IN WYOMING

Brian Sebade

Wyoming hosts many different shrubs. Some have edible delicious and nutritious berries every fall, and some have berries poisonous to humans. Can you identify which of these not-so-common Wyoming native berries are safe and edible and those that are not?

Western baneberry, *Actaea rubra*. This shrub is found growing in moist soils throughout much of Wyoming. Plants are generally 2 to 3 feet high and have bright red- to white-colored berries held upright. The berries are poisonous to humans. This plant is a member of the buttercup family. Leaves can be confused with leaves of other shrubs with edible berries.

Black twinberry honeysuckle, *Lonicera involucrata*. This shrub has large elliptical leaves arranged opposite from each other on the stem. Berries are dark purple when ripe and hang in groups of two. This plant is found in moist mountainous

areas in southeastern Wyoming and the western half of the state. The berries are not edible and are poisonous to humans. Plants are generally 2 to 5 feet in height.

Bog blueberry, *Vaccinium occidentale*. This plant is found at high-elevation, riparian areas of northwest Wyoming. This shrub rarely exceeds 3 feet in height and has an alternating leaf arrangement on the stem. This plant produces dark blue to purple berries similar to commercial blueberry varieties in the supermarket. The delicious, edible berries generally ripen in August and early September.

Elderberry, *Sambucus racemosa*, this shrub reaches 5 to 6 feet in height. There are three varieties of this shrub in Wyoming, with the most common recognized by red berries. This plant enjoys moist soils of mountains and forests in Wyoming and has beautiful white flowers in the spring. The berries are poisonous until cooked properly.

Berries should only be consumed with expert guidance.

Whitestem gooseberry, *Ribes inerme*. This shrub is found in most Wyoming mountain ranges except in the Bighorn Mountains and the Wyoming Black Hills. The dark purple, almost black berries are excellent when eaten fresh or cooked. Plants have spines and alternating simple palmately lobed leaves. Plants enjoy moist areas of mid- and high elevations and reach heights of 2 to 4 feet.

Rocky Mountain gooseberry, *Ribes montigenum*, is a shrub with bright-red berries when ripe. This plant is found throughout most of Wyoming, often at high elevations growing in rocky soils. Flowers are generally pink in color. The stems of this plant have spines, and the simple palmately lobed leaves are alternately arranged on the stem. The berries can be eaten fresh or made into jams or jellies.

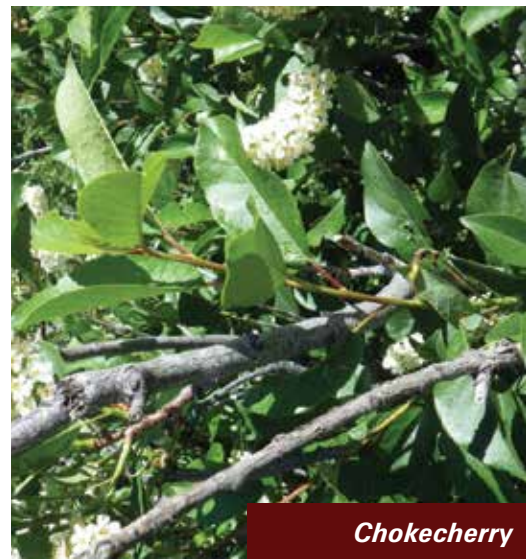
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Western baneberry



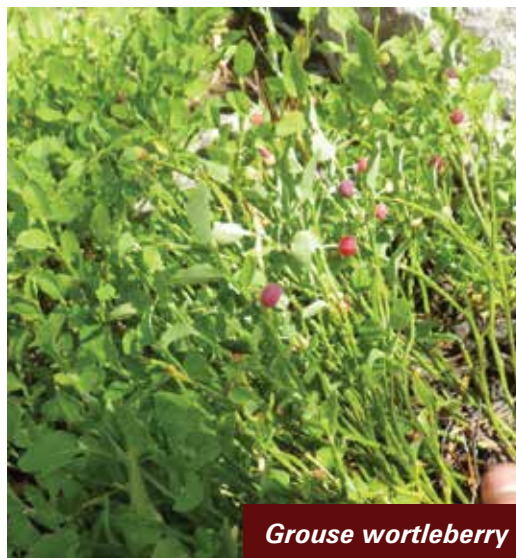
Bog blueberry



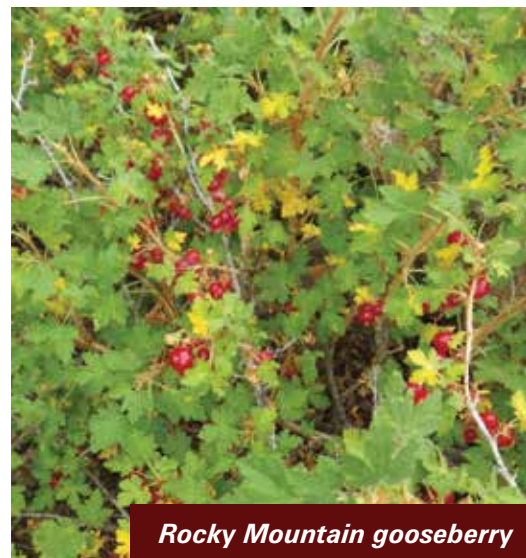
Chokecherry



Elderberry



Grouse wortleberry



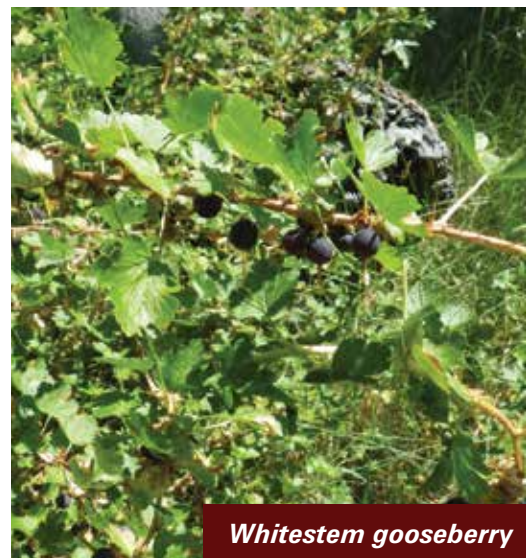
Rocky Mountain gooseberry



Serviceberry



Twinberry honeysuckle



Whitestem gooseberry

Chokecherry, *Prunus virginiana*, is a small tree-to-large shrub of Wyoming. Plants are a member of the cherry family and produce a small, edible cherry with a large pit. Plants are recognized by bright white flowers during the spring, bright red berries during the summer, and a dark purple to black-colored berry in the fall. These plants enjoy moist soils for at least part of the growing season. Leaves are simple and have small teeth on the leaf margins. The pits can be poisonous if eaten in large quantities.

Serviceberry, *Amelanchier alnifolia*, is a medium to large shrub with simple leaves. The leaves have teeth

on the upper two-thirds. To some, the berries taste similar to blueberries. Berries start out reddish pink and turn dark blue to purple when ripe. If grown at home, shrubs need netted or the birds will eat them all. Stems and bark are a deep brown to reddish color. This shrub is an important winter forage for wildlife.

Grouse wortleberry, *Vaccinium scoparium*, is a low-growing shrub found growing in mountains and foothills. Plants produce a dark red to pink-colored berry. Berries are small, yet very delicious eaten raw. Leaves are quite small, from 0.5 to 1.5 centimeters in length. Plants mostly grow under forest canopies of moist soils.



Questions? Contact University of Wyoming Extension educator **Brian Sebade** at (307) 721-2571 or bsebade@uwyo.edu.

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