

herbs at a glance

Bilberry



© Steven Foster

This fact sheet provides basic information about bilberry—common names, what the science says, potential side effects and cautions, and resources for more information.

Common Names—bilberry, European blueberry, whortleberry, huckleberry

Latin Name—*Vaccinium myrtillus*

Bilberry is a relative of the blueberry, and its fruit is commonly used to make pies and jams. It has been used for nearly 1,000 years in traditional European medicine. Bilberry grows in North America, Europe, and northern Asia. Historically, bilberry fruit was used to treat diarrhea, scurvy, and other conditions. Today, the fruit is used as a folk or traditional remedy for diarrhea, menstrual cramps, eye problems, varicose veins, venous insufficiency (a condition in which the veins do not efficiently return blood from the legs to the heart), and other circulatory problems. Bilberry leaf is used for entirely different conditions, including diabetes.

The fruit of the bilberry plant can be eaten or made into extracts. Similarly, the leaves of the bilberry plant can be made into extracts or used to make teas.

What the Science Says

- Some claim that bilberry fruit improves night vision, but clinical studies have not shown this to be true.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of bilberry fruit or leaf for any health conditions.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Bilberry fruit is considered safe when consumed in amounts typically found in foods, or as an extract in recommended doses for brief periods of time. Long-term safety and side effects have not been extensively studied.
- High doses or extended use of bilberry leaf or leaf extract are considered unsafe due to possible toxic side effects.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health

National Center for Complementary
and Alternative Medicine



NCAM

- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about complementary and alternative medicine, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

Bilberry. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturaldatabase.com on August 13, 2009.

Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturalstandard.com on August 13, 2009.

Bilberry fruit. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:16-21.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

PubMed®

Web site: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Bilberry Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/202.html

This publication is not copyrighted and is in the public domain. Duplication is encouraged.

NCCAM has provided this material for your information. It is not intended to substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your primary health care provider. We encourage you to discuss any decisions about treatment or care with your health care provider. The mention of any product, service, or therapy is not an endorsement by NCCAM.

National Institutes of Health



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services