

Bilberry

This fact sheet provides basic information about bilberry—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Bilberry is a relative of the blueberry, and its fruit is commonly used to make pies and jams. Bilberry grows in North America, Europe, and northern Asia.

Common Names—European blueberry, whortleberry, huckleberry

Latin Name—*Vaccinium myrtillus*

What It Is Used For

- Bilberry has been used for nearly 1,000 years in traditional European medicine.
- Historically, bilberry fruit was used to treat diarrhea, scurvy, and other conditions.
- Today, the fruit is used to treat diarrhea, menstrual cramps, eye problems, varicose veins, venous insufficiency (poor blood flow to the heart), and other circulatory problems.
- Bilberry leaf is used for entirely different conditions, including diabetes.

How It Is Used

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 other health conditions.
- NCCAM has not yet funded any research on bilberry.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Bilberry fruit is considered safe. However, high doses of bilberry leaf or leaf extract are considered unsafe; animal studies have shown high doses to be toxic.
- Tell your health care providers about any herb or dietary supplement you are using, including bilberry. This helps to ensure safe and coordinated care.

Sources

Bilberry. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on March 29, 2006.

Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on March 29, 2006.

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:

- “What’s in the Bottle? An Introduction to Dietary Supplements” at nccam.nih.gov/health/bottle/
- “Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too” at nccam.nih.gov/health/supplement-safety/

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

CAM on PubMed

Web site: www.nlm.nih.gov/nccam/camonpubmed.html

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

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

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