

**Scientific Name:** *Actaea rubra* (Aiton) Willd. **Family:** *Ranunculaceae*

**Common Names:** baneberry

### Plant Description

Dimorphic, perennial, 0.3 m to 1 m tall; from fleshy rhizomes; hairless, 1 to several stems; leaves, alternate, few, from the stem, 2 to 10 cm long, 2 to 3 times divided in 3; segments coarsely sharp-toothed and lobed; many flowers, rounded clusters on long stalks, white sepals and petals 2 to 3.5 mm long (Johnson et al. 1995).

Petal number and stamen number vary between flowers (Lehmann and Sattler 1994).

**Fruit:** Glossy red or white (not both) ovoid berries containing several seeds; 6 to 8 mm long and poisonous (Johnson et al. 1995).

**Seed:** Brown half-moon shaped seed 3 to 4 mm long.

### Habitat and Distribution

Moist woods, thickets, meadows and stream banks (Moss 1983).

**Seral Stage:** Mid to late seral.

**Soil:** Cool moist nutrient, rich sites (Crane 1990).

**Distribution:** Alaska, Yukon and western District of Mackenzie to Hudson Bay, Newfoundland south to California, Arizona, New Mexico, South Dakota, Ohio, New Jersey (Moss 1983).

### Phenology

Flowering May to July and fruits persist from August to October across their range (Crane 1990).

### Pollination

Wind and small insect pollination (Pellmyr 1985).

### Seed Dispersal

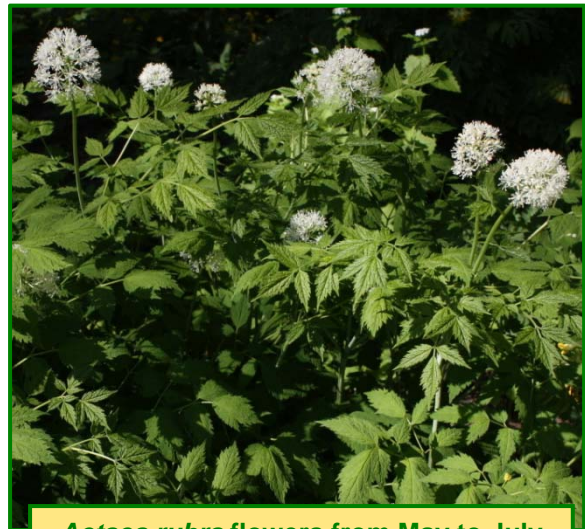
By birds (Willson 1983).

### Genetics

2n=16 (Moss 1983).

### Symbiosis

Brundrett and Kendrick (1988) found that up to 80% of *A. rubra* roots were colonized by vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizae.



***Actaea rubra* flowers from May to July across their range.**

### Seed Processing

**Collection:** Collect ripe seeds into buckets or plastic bags. Keep seeds cool until they can be processed. Wear gloves and/or wash hands as berries are poisonous (Droppo 1987, Turner 1997).

**Seed Weight:** 5.7 g/1,000 seeds (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

**Harvest Dates:** Late July. When berries are no longer green but either red or white.

**Cleaning:** Macerate fruit in water and decant.

**Storage Behaviour:** Not tested but possibly orthodox (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

**Storage:** Orthodox, seed can be dried and stored frozen (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

**Longevity:** Unknown.

### Propagation

**Natural Regeneration:** Spread by rhizomes (Johnson et al. 1995).

**Germination:** Takes 2 years to germinate (Crane 1990). Germination occurred 243 days after sowing and only 8.8% of the seed germinated (Crane 1990).

**Pre-treatment:** Stratify 4 weeks in warm conditions and 6 weeks cold (Crane 1990).

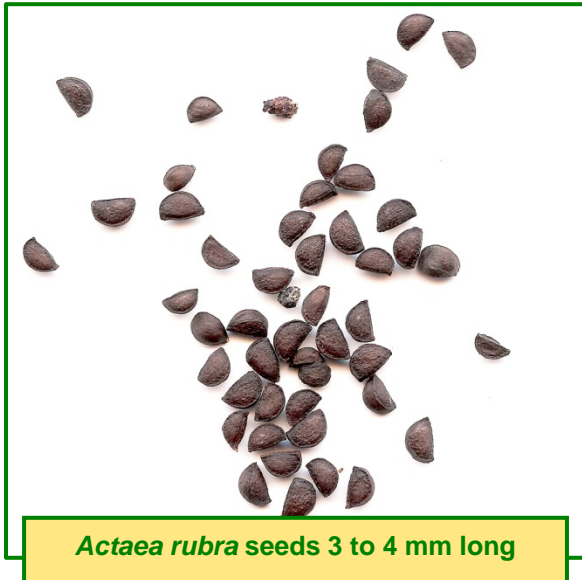
112 days stratification was done at 22/17°C (Baskin and Baskin 2002).

Sow at 18 to 22°C for 2 to 4 weeks, move to -4 to 4°C for 4 to 6 weeks, move to 5 to 12°C for germination (Clothier 2012).

**Planting Density:** No literature found.

**Seed Rate:** No literature found.

**Vegetative Propagation:** No literature found.



### Aboriginal/Food Uses

**Food:** Is poisonous (especially for children – Droppo 1987) and can cause death; ingesting this plant is not recommended (Johnson et al. 1995). The toxicity of baneberry is attributed to an essential oil which produces symptoms of severe gastro-enteritis (Turner 1997).

**Medicinal:** Native Americans used the roots to treat coughs and colds, sores, hemorrhages, stomachaches, syphilis, and emaciation; preparations from the entire plant as a purgative; and infusions from the stems to increase milk flow (eFloras n.d.).

**Other:** Used in various Native American ceremonies (eFloras n.d.).



### Wildlife/Forage Usage

**Wildlife:** Is consumed by several bird species (Crane 1990).

**Livestock:** Not consumed unless there is no other palatable forage available and can be deadly to livestock. Poor to fair forage (Crane 1990).

**Grazing Response:** Increaser (Tannas 2004).

### Reclamation Potential

Low to moderate value for erosion control and revegetation potential and provide moderate biomass to a disturbed area. Easily grown from seed (Crane 1990).

### Notes

*Actaea rubra* is listed as 83% intact (less occurrences than expected) in the Alberta oil sands region (Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute 2014).

### Photo Credits

**Photo 1:** Anneli Salo @ Wikimedia Common 2010.

**Photo 2:** Hardyplants @ English Wikipedia 2012.

**Photo 3:** Walter Siegmund @ Wikimedia Commons 2012.

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