



Lowbush Blueberry Fact Sheet

Bunchberry

Cornus canadensis L.

Other names: Pigeonberry, crackerberry, dwarf cornel, pudding berry

Description

Bunchberry is a perennial, herbaceous species which grows up to 25 cm in height from horizontally spreading, underground stems known as rhizomes. The leaves are opposite but occur in an apparent whorl of 4-6 leaves at the top of the stem. There is often 1 or 2 pairs of smaller leaf-like scales on the lower stem. The leaves are elliptic with conspicuous parallel veins and are up to 8.5 cm in length and up to 5 cm in width. The inflorescence is single, occurring on a short stalk above the leaves in early June. Four white petal-like structures known as bracts surround the cluster of small greenish to purple flowers, each with four petals. The fruit is bright red and berry-like with a small stone that usually contains a single seed. The fruit ripens in July and August.

Economic Importance

Bunchberry is one of the most common weeds found in lowbush blueberry fields in eastern Canada. In a survey conducted by McCully *et al* (1991), bunchberry was found to occur in 84% of the blueberry fields surveyed in Nova Scotia. There is little information on the competitive ability of bunchberry in blueberry. However, since it



Fig. 1 - Bunchberry

does occur in association with blueberries, it would compete for space, nutrients, moisture and other resources also required by blueberries. The fruit of bunchberry is often harvested with the lowbush blueberry crop and must be removed before processing of the crop. This is an added cost to the processor.





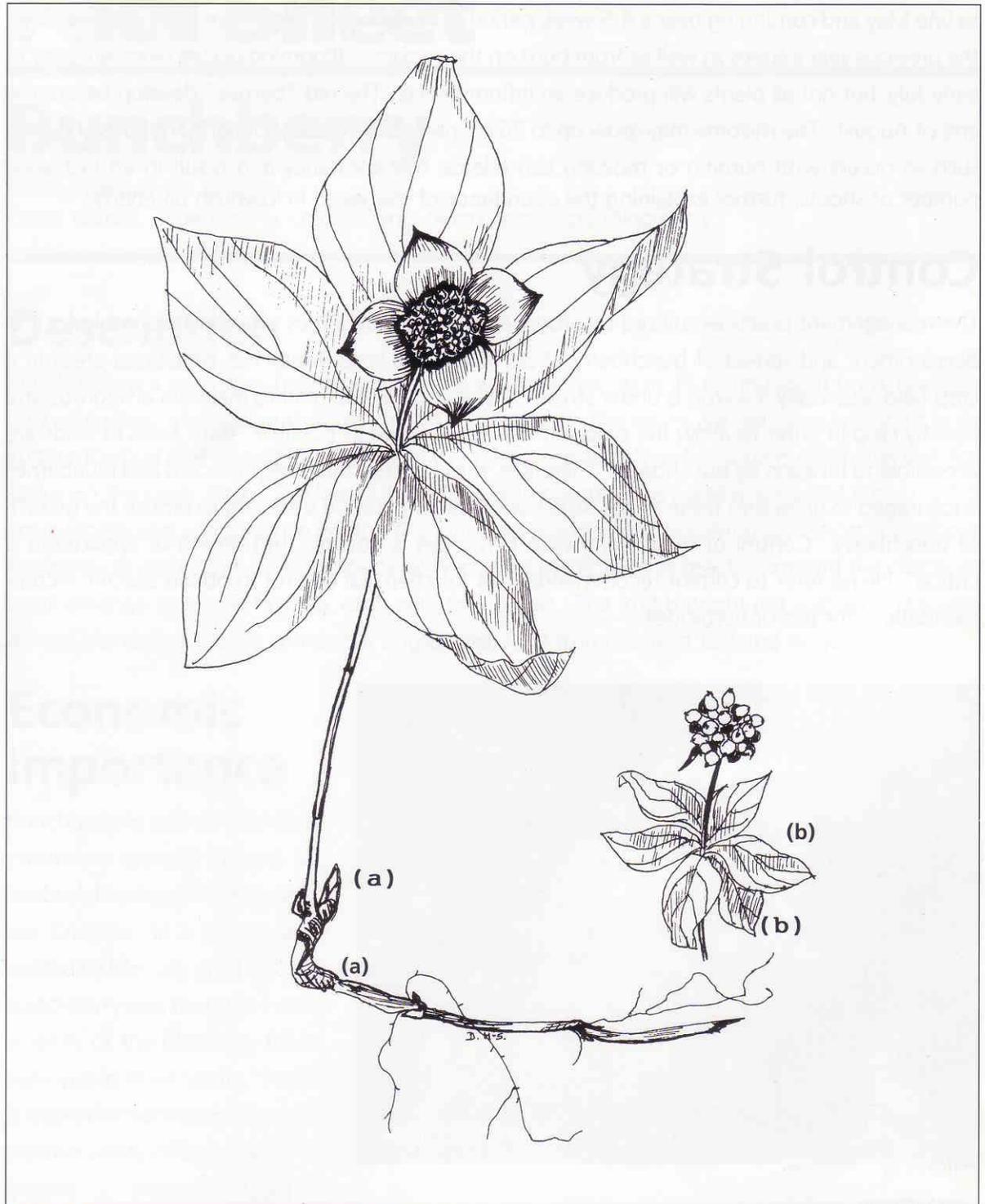
Fig. 2 - Bunchberry Flower.



Fig. 3 - Bunchberry in blueberry.



Bunchberry occurs in most forest habitats in eastern Canada and grows slowly in the shade of both deciduous and coniferous trees. Once the forest canopy has been removed, it becomes the dominant vegetation. This explains its predominance in blueberry fields developed from woodland.



Cornus canadensis L.
(Bunchberry)
(a) Flowering plant and (b) fruiting plant





Life Cycle

Bunchberry is a perennial species that passes the winter usually as buds on the rhizome below the soil surface. It is one of the first plants to emerge in the spring with shoots first emerging in mid to late May and continuing over a 4-5 week period. The shoots emerge from buds at the base of the previous year's stems as well as from buds on the rhizome. Blooming occurs from late May to early July, but not all plants will produce an inflorescence. The red "berries" develop before the end of August. The rhizome may grow up to 30 cm per year, with several dormant buds. Pruning such as occurs with burning or mowing can release this dormancy and result in an increased number of shoots, further explaining the abundance of this weed in lowbush blueberry.

Control Strategy

The management practices utilized to produce lowbush blueberries are also favourable for the development and spread of bunchberry. Bunchberry will spread into less developed areas in a crop field, especially if a crop is under stress. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a vigorous and healthy crop in order to allow the crop to be as competitive as possible. Bare areas in fields are accessible to invasion by bunchberry. Therefore, these areas should be protected and blueberries encouraged to grow into these areas. Additional shading may be sufficient to reduce the growth of bunchberry. Control of bunchberry with herbicides is possible, but timing of application is critical. Please refer to current recommendations for chemical control to obtain specific recommendations for use of herbicides.

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