

Bittersweet Nightshade

Solanum dulcamara

Look for Bittersweet Nightshade in shady, damp areas in the wetlands.

Bittersweet nightshade is a member of the same family as the potato and tomato. It's a semi-woody herbaceous perennial vine, capable of reaching 12 feet in height. Along with other climbers, it creates a dark and impenetrable shelter for varied animals. The leaves are 3-4" long, roughly arrowhead-shaped, and often lobed at the base. The star-shaped flowers have five pinkish-purple petals and yellow stamens and style pointing forward; they bloom in small loose clusters of 3-20 blossoms.



The fruit is an ovoid red berry about ¼" long, soft and juicy, that looks and smells much like a tiny tomato. The Latin name *dulcamara* refers to the flavor of the berries, which are first bitter, then unpleasantly sweet. The berry is poisonous to humans and livestock but relatively important in the diet of some birds (European thrushes) who are immune to the poison and disperse the seeds so widely that this plant is found in a very broad range of habitats, from woodlands to scrubland, hedges, and marshes throughout Europe, Asia, the US, and Canada.



The FDA classifies bittersweet as an unsafe poisonous herb; and although the plant has long been recognized as being highly toxic, it has been used for centuries as an external remedy for skin abrasions and inflammation. The stems were approved by the German Commission E for external use as supportive therapy in chronic eczema. Bittersweet nightshade has also been used to treat cancers, tumors, and warts since ancient times as far

back as Galen (AD 180). In the Middle Ages the plant was thought to be effective against witchcraft, and was sometimes hung around the neck of cattle to protect them from the "evil eye."

Bittersweet Nightshade blooms from May through September.