Bilberry

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.
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


For More Information


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

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