

# Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

## The Writings of Eloise Butler



### Shrubs in the Wild Garden - 1926

The brightly hued berries of the shrubs are but a “fleeting show” in the garden, being scarcely allowed to ripen by the fruit-loving birds. The sweet fruit of the shadbush or Juneberry vanished like dew before the sun, shortly after the eye is gladdened by the gracefully drooping sprays of *Amelanchier canadense* in flower and the more upright plumes of the low gray-leaved *A. oblongifolia*.

The dogwoods richly furnish forth the bird tables. The gray dogwood, *Cornus paniculata* [*C. racemosa*], is the most abundant of all. The inflorescence does not unfavorably compare with white lilac, and the profuse white berries, borne on red stalks, are very pleasing. Red-osier dogwood, *C. stolonifera* [*C. sericea*], forms a cordon around the swamp, warms the snow, and enlivens winter landscape with its red stems. The stems turn brown as the leaves develop, but then it is soon adorned with flowers and white or bluish fruits and has the further recommendation of blossoming twice during the season. This shrub is selected by a certain sawfly for an egg depository, and hundreds of her larvae banded with olive green and pale yellow may be found coiled like little serpents on the under side of the leaves. *C. alternifolia* [Pagoda Dogwood] is certainly our handsomest dogwood, its glossy leaves forming tufts at the ends of the branches, and flower clusters so large that is often mistaken for an arrowwood; but the four-parted corolla shows that is not a kin. *C. circinata* [*C. rugosa* - Roundleaf Dogwood] is another fine species that may be distinguished by its larger round leaves and greenish, warty stems. The silky dogwood, *Cornus amomum*, with its waxy blooms and dull purplish stems, is distinguished by being the favorite kinnikinnik of the Indians. The bark of the red-osier dogwood was also used by the Indians for tobacco, but the former was preferred. *Cornus baileyi* [basically *C. sericea* - Red Osier] also a native of Minnesota, naturalized, but not endemic in the Reserve, bears a general resemblance to *C. stolonifera*, although it does not form a thicket by the stolon habit. All these dogwoods are bog-trotters, except that *C. circinata* will also thrive on woody hillsides.

Also a dweller in bogland is the lovely herbaceous member of this genus, the dwarf cornel, or bunchberry, *Cornus canadensis*. The flower Cluster with four showy white bracts surrounding a bunch of small inconspicuous flowers that develop into red berries, resembles on a smaller scale that of its beautiful congener, the flowering *Cornus florida*, which, alas, is too tender for the rigorous climate of Minnesota. The dwarf cornel spreads by slender creeping rootstocks and makes an excellent ground cover for low shady places. The “bunch” of sweet berries is considered delectable by children, despite a doubtful suspicion of being poisonous. I, myself, have devoured them by handfuls without any ill effect. *Cornus asperifolia*, the rough-leaved dogwood . . . is not found in the neighborhood of Minneapolis and has not yet been planted in the wild garden.

Our arrow-woods or viburnums are even superior to the dogwoods for bird food. Some of the fruit is, indeed, appreciated by humans. The flower clusters are larger and more striking, and the foliage is vividly conspicuous in autumn. Nannybush, or sheepberry, *Viburnum lentago*, takes the lead in height, the trunks often clustered. The leafstalks have wing-like margins, the buds are shaped like candle extinguishers, the drupes are bluish black, as are also the fruits of the lower and almost equally attractive downy arrow-wood, *V. pubescens* [She lists the wrong species. Downy Arrowwood is *V. affine* in her day, now *V. refinesquianum*]. The fruit of *V. dentatum* [Southern Arrowwood] is an exquisite shade of blue. The last named species is not endemic in the Reserve. Other introduced species are hobblebush



Highbush Cranberry fruit in Eloise Butler. *Viburnum opulus* var. *americanum*

or moosewood, *V. alnifolium* [*V. lantanoides*], a resident of northern woods, witheredod, *V. cassinoides*, very decorative in fruit, its wand-like stems wreathed with globes in varying shades of green, reddish brown and blue-black; dockmackie, the maple-leaved arrow-wood, *V. acerifolium*, common in New England; and the few flowered high-bush cranberry, *V. pauciflorum* [*V. edule*, Squashberry], endemic in northern Minnesota. The widely distributed highbush cranberry, *V. opulus* var. *americanum*, is fortunately one of the native adornments of the Reserve. With showy inflorescences and bright red fruit, it vies in beauty with the famous flowering dogwood. The fruit, as acid as genuine cranberries, is esteemed for jelly, it hangs on the bushes late in the season, and the Bohemian waxwing may be seen culling from them his dessert for Thanksgiving. As you all know, the useless stupid garden snowball was produced from the European *V. opulus*, which is almost identical with the American variety, by converting the small fruit-bearing flowers into showy neutrals like those bordering the clusters, at the expense of beauty and food for man, bird, and bee. Thereby was overturned the house that Jack Built, for Dame Nature, who practices economy when she can, had intended the neutrals for guide boards to insects that, in getting the food prepared for them in the numerous small perfect flowers, would do service in turn, by insuring fruit for birds and humans.

The ten shrubs most common in the Reserve are: willows, of which the most abundant are *Salix discolor* [Pussy Willow], *S. petiolaris* [Slender Willow], *S. rostrata* [*S. bebbiana*, Bebb Willow]; common hazel (*Corylus americana*); prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*); beaked hazel (*Corylus cornuta*); smooth sumach (*Rhus glabra*); gray dogwood (*Cornus paniculata* [*racemosa*]); red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera* [*sericea*]); dwarf birch (*Betula pumila*); wild buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*); round-leaved thorn (*Crataegus rotundifolia*) [*Crataegus chrysocarpa* var. *hrysocarpa*].

Of the many other species of endemic shrubs, none are infrequent except *Ilex verticillata* [Winterberry]. Of the under-shrubs, even more abundant are: Blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*), raspberry (*Rubus idaeus* var. *aculeatissimus*), wolfberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*), poison ivy (*Rhus toxicodendron*) [*Toxicodendron rydbergii*].

The above under-shrubs may be denominated “weeds” and are grubbed out continually. Others abundant, but not allowed to be rampant, are: *Rosa blanda*, bush honeysuckle, (*Diervilla lonicera*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*); and the vines: bitterseeet (*Celastrus scandens*), wild grape (*Vitis vulpina*), Virginia creeper (*Psedera quinquefolia* [now *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*]).

Below: Autumn leaves of the Blackberry *Rubus allegheniensis*.



**Notes:**

Since Eloise Butler's time, the scientific names of plants and the classification of plant families has undergone extensive revision. In brackets within the text, have been added when necessary, the revised scientific name for the references she used in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America*, and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*. Other information in brackets may add clarification to what she is saying.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau

The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.