

SNOWBERRY

Symphoricarpos albus (L.)

Blake

plant symbol = SYAL

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center



Brother Alfred Brousseau
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Alternate Names

white coralberry, common snowberry

Uses

Ethnobotanic: Some southern groups made brooms out of the branches and the Gitksan hollowed out the twigs to make pipe-stems (MacKinnon, Pojar, & Coupe´ 1992). One or two of the berries were eaten by the Stl'atl'imx to settle the stomach after too much fatty food (Pojar & MacKinnon 1994). An infusion of the fruit was used as eyewash for sore eyes and the berries were rubbed on the skin as treatment for burns, rashes, and sores (Moerman 1998). A decoction of the roots and stems was used in the treatment of the inability to urinate, venereal diseases, tuberculosis and the fevers associated with teething sickness (Ibid.). A tea made from the roots of this species was used to clear up afterbirth (Fielder 1975).

Wildlife: Snowberry is an important browse for many types of livestock and wildlife. It is important for shelter and food for various birds and small mammals.

Status

Please consult the Plants Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae). Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) is a shrub or small tree that grows up to six meters tall. The leaves are large, opposite, divided into five to seven leaflets, and toothed or irregularly lobed. The fruits are white, berry like drupes, and one to one and a half centimeters in diameter. The flowers are small, white to creamy, with a strong unpleasant odor; numerous in a rounded or pyramidal parasol-like cluster (Pojar & MacKinnon 1994); blooming from mid May to July. The fruits are roundish, dull-white berries about 3/8 inch in diameter, soon becoming blackish, ripening August or September (Grimm 1993).

Distribution: Snowberry inhabits slopes and valley bottoms of the foothills of the Coast Ranges, the Sierra Nevada, and the mountains of southern California (McMinn 1939). It extends northward to British Columbia and eastward to Pennsylvania and the New England states (Ibid.).

For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation

Symphoricarpos albus is found along stream banks, in swampy thickets, moist clearings and open forests at sea level to middle elevations (Pojar & MacKinnon 1994). It tolerates soil types but grows best in heavy clay soils. Snowberry grows well in sun or shade.

Establishment

Propagation by Seed: *Symphoricarpos albus* seeds are best sown in the fall after maturity. Dormancy of this species is caused by hard seed coat and immature embryo, which can be broken by stratification in sand and peat for 90 days at 77°, plus 180 days at 41°F. When the seedlings are large enough to handle, place them into individual pots and grow them in the greenhouse for their first winter. Plant seedlings into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer.

Management

Snowberry fruit contains low concentrations of a bitter principle, saponin, which foams in water. It is very poorly absorbed by the body and can be broken down by thoroughly cooking the fruit. Saponin is much more toxic to some creatures, such as fish, if eaten in large quantities.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Commonly available through native plant nurseries, except in the south.

References

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