

School-to-Nature



Black Haw Viburnum (Tree or Shrub)

There are three historic plants in the McCalvy section of Tabor Woods that helped the Caledonia Conservancy to earn a Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program grant through the DNR, allowing the purchase of that property to preserve it. They are the Beech Tree, the Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod flower, and the Black Haw Viburnum Tree. The Black Haw Viburnum is on the Wisconsin Special Concern List for rare “old-growth” native-growing plants. (Articles about the other two plants mentioned are also on the S2N page of the CC website.)

Black Haw Viburnum is a shrub that can become a small tree, typically 12-15 feet high but sometimes higher. It grows naturally in hardwood forests, typically in woods edges where there is some sunlight. It is different from the 149 other viburnum species in that its leaves are smooth, and leaf veins are very straight, not branching. The tree bark of Black Haw is said to resemble alligator hide and to have a “cork-y” appearance.



This plant has showy white flowers bunches, late May through late June, and forms dark blue berry-like fruits (called drupes), by September. The nectar and pollen of the flowers attracts small native bees, flies, bumblebees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The ripe fruit attracts birds, chipmunks, squirrels, and mice. The fully ripened fruit is edible to humans as well. Leaves are eaten by deer and leaf beetles. In the fall, leaves turn very bright red and bronze colors. Black Haw Viburnum is used often as a landscape plant. Tip for growers: this plant should be pruned back only immediately after the bloom time.

Native Americans and early settlers used the boiled root bark of Black Haw as a pain reliever, because it contains Salicin, a chemical relative of Aspirin.

June 2022 BH / DL