

ROSACEAE · ROSE FAMILY

Whitebark Raspberry

Rubus leucodermis

POMO · KASHAYA POMO · BELLA COOLA · KLAMATH · COAST SALISH

Native Range: Western North America — British Columbia to California, New Mexico & northern Mexico, east to Idaho & Montana

⊕ About This Plant

Whitebark raspberry, also called blackcap or black raspberry, is a deciduous bramble growing 3–8 feet tall with distinctive arching canes covered in a powdery white-blue waxy coating — the 'whitebark' that gives it its name. The canes are armed with recurved thorns and bear leaves with 3–5 leaflets, green above and white-hairy beneath.

The small white to pink flowers bloom in spring, followed by intensely flavored raspberries that ripen from red to deep purple-black. The berries detach cleanly from the receptacle, leaving a hollow 'thimble' shape — the hallmark of a true raspberry. The flavor is sweet-tart with a richness and complexity that many consider superior to any cultivated variety. While the crown is perennial, the canes are biennial — growing vegetatively one year, fruiting the second,

then dying.

Growing Conditions

LIGHT

Full sun to shade — highly adaptable

WATER

Low to moderate — drought tolerant but better fruit with some moisture

SOIL

Well-drained, prefers organic-rich soil. Adaptable.

HARDINESS

USDA Zones 5–9

MATURE SIZE

3–8 ft tall, arching and spreading

GROWTH RATE

Moderate — biennial canes, spreads by tip layering

BLOOM

Small white to pink flowers, April–July. Fruit ripens June–August.

HABITAT

Canyons, slopes, forest edges, clear-cuts, and burn sites. Found in North Coastal Coniferous Forest, Redwood Forest, Douglas-Fir Forest, and Mixed Evergreen Forest communities.

Traditional & Cultural Uses

Food — Fresh, Dried & Preserved

Berries were a valued food for many tribes across the plant's range. The Bella Coola dried berries into cakes for winter food. The Coeur d'Alene ate them fresh. The Klamath dried them for later use. The Kashaya Pomo canned berries for winter. Young, peeled shoots were also eaten like asparagus in spring.

Beverage

The Cahuilla soaked berries in water to make a refreshing beverage. Leaf tea, rich in vitamin C, was enjoyed by multiple groups.

Medicinal Root & Leaf Tea

An infusion of leaves or roots was widely used as a remedy for diarrhea, upset stomach, and influenza. The tannin-rich roots and leaves provided astringent relief for digestive distress.

Wound Care

A poultice of powdered stems was applied directly to wounds and cuts as a healing treatment.

Natural Dye

The Thompson people used the berry juice as a stain. The Coast Salish combined it with salal, black twinberry, and wild raspberry fruits to create a purple dye.

A LIVING RELATIONSHIP

Whitebark raspberry is a reminder that some of the most valuable things in the world are small, hidden, and seasonal. These berries won't wait for you at the store — you have to know when and where to find them, just as our ancestors did. The act of walking the land to harvest what grows naturally is itself a form of reconnection.

Medicinal Uses

Digestive Remedy

Leaf and root infusions were the primary medicinal preparation, used for diarrhea, stomach upset, and dysentery. The high tannin content provides natural astringency.

Wound Healing

Powdered stems were applied as a poultice to cuts and wounds to promote healing and stop bleeding.

Nutritional Medicine

The berries are exceptionally high in anthocyanins and antioxidants, with significant vitamin C content. The dark color indicates concentrated beneficial compounds.

Ecological Role

Wildlife habitat — Berries are eaten by grouse, quail, jays, robins, thrushes, sparrows, bears, raccoons, foxes, and squirrels. The thorny thickets provide secure cover for small animals.

Pollinator support — Flowers attract native bees, bumble bees, and other pollinators. The plant provides nesting materials for native bees.

Pioneer species — One of the first plants to establish on burned or logged sites,

providing quick ground cover and food resources.

Soil building — Deep root systems help stabilize slopes and build organic matter in forest soils.

|| Propagation

- 1 **Tip layering:** The natural method — first-year cane tips grow downward in fall, touch soil, and root to form new plants. Simply sever in spring.
- 2 **Root division:** Separate established clumps in early spring before growth begins.
- 3 **Seed:** Clean seeds from ripe fruit, cold stratify for 90–120 days, sow in spring. Germination can be slow.
- 4 **Cuttings:** Semi-hardwood cuttings in summer with rooting hormone. Moderate success rate.

