

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

www.grannyearth.com



Autumn Olive

Ask Granny Earth

I've been reading about a plant called "Autumn Olive" and its ability to heal cancer and heart disease. Do you know anything about this plant?

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) is a bushy, deciduous (sheds its leaves annually) shrub, which grows to heights of between 3 and 16 feet, and is found growing along roadsides, pastures and fields in a wide range of soils, including poor soil. Its ability to thrive in poor soil is due to its nitrogen-fixing root nodules. It doesn't thrive in wet sites or deep forests.

Being first introduced to the United States from east Asia in the 1830's and planted in Eastern and central United States for re-vegetation of disturbed areas as an ornamental, Autumn Olive is now considered to be an "invasive species" in many areas from Maine to Virginia and as far west as Wisconsin. This is due to several reasons:

1. Its berries are eaten by birds and dispersed.

2. It thrives in poor soil.
3. It re-sprouts vigorously after cutting or burning.

The leaves of Autumn are 1–3 inches long and 1–1 ½ inches wide, alternate and oval to lanceolate (narrow and tapering at each end) and untoothed. The underside of the dark green leaf is covered with silver-white scales. It flowers in May with small, light yellow flowers, giving way to cranberry tasting fruit (juicy red berries) in September and October.

Although this fruit is edible and abundant, it was reported to be of little use until just recently when it was discovered to be an excellent source of lycopene. Lycopene has generated a lot of interest lately as a possible deterrent to heart disease, and cancers of the prostate, cervix and gastrointestinal tract (Judy McBride; Agricultural Research Service, USDA).

Lycopene is the phytochemical that is found in tomatoes and tomato products, which plays an important role in the prevention of disease, especially certain cancers, such as prostate cancer, and heart disease. This is, because lycopene is one of the most potent and effective dietary antioxidants known at this time (Monthly Research Updates: www.lycopene.org). Autumn Olive berries contain the same carotenoids as tomatoes: lycopene, beta carotene and lutein.

Scientists have found that ounce for ounce, Autumn Olive berries are 15 to 18 times richer in lycopene than tomatoes. Beverly Clevidence, who runs the U S Dept. of Agriculture's Phytonutrient Laboratory stated that, "It's rare to see lycopene in anything that's not tomato-based. I was surprised to find such a high lycopene content in the Autumn Olive berry."