

*Empetrum nigrum*

[Synonyms : *Empetrum nigrum* subsp. *nigrum*, *Empetrum scoticum*]

**CROWBERRY** is an evergreen, heather-like shrub (that forms a dense carpet). Native to northern temperate areas it has very small purplish flowers.

It is also known as Baby heathberry, Bearberry, Berry-girse, Black-berried heath, Blackberry, Blackberry heath, Black crowberry, *Camarine noire* (French), *Corisraan* (Irish Gaelic), Crakeberry, Crake crowberry, Crane, Crauberry, Crawberry, Crawcrooks, Crawcroups, *Creiglys* (Welsh), Crow ling, Crow pea, Curlew berry, Deer's grass, *Empetro nigra* (Esperanto), Heath, Heathberry, Heath-urts, Hog cranberry, Knauperts, *Kraekling* (Norwegian), *Krähenbeere* (German), *Kråkbär* (Swedish), *Kråkris* (Swedish), Lingberry, *Moonogs* (Irish Gaelic), Monnocks, Monnocs-heather, Monox, Monox heather, Pigeon berry, *Rauschbeere* (German), Redberry, Red heath, Rockberry, She heather, *Šicha černá* (Czech), Squirt plum, *Šucha* (Slovak), *Variksenmarja* (Finnish), Wineberry, and Wire-ling.

*Nigrum* means 'black'.

With alum, the tiny lustrous black fruit have been used to dye material black.

Crowberry was a staple food for local North American Indian tribes, including the Tsimshian, Cree, some of the Chippewa and the Tanana, and today is still viewed as an important part of Inuit diet, especially that of the Arctic and Alaskan Inuits. In fact some authorities suggest that many Alaskan Inuits might eulogize today over the joys of a centuries-old traditional fish liver and crowberry dish that is highly nutritious and can give such pleasure that it can be eaten to bursting, day after day, without desire for any other food. The Tanana Indians and some of the Inuits froze the berries for future use, while hunters in the Koyukon Indian tribe viewed the fruit as thirst quenchers when water was scarce.

For one or two North American Indian tribes the shrub is a source of medicine. The Tanana have used it for treating kidney disorders, diarrhoea, eye problems and colds, while some of the Cree have prescribed it for fluid retention and the Bella Coola Indians have used it as a purgative.

It is suggested by some authorities that the berries are an acquired taste. However when ripe they are eaten with seal meat in Greenland and are made into a drink (with sour milk) in Iceland. In some countries they have also been used for making jams and preserves.

Although the fruit are avoided by sheep and deer many birds and animals enjoy them, including game-birds such as grouse and ptarmigan, and also geese, gulls and thrushes – and foxes.

It is an emblem of the Scottish MacLean clan.