

# WOODY PLANTS OF GABRIOLA

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This is a brief description of trees and shrubs growing on Gabriola. The Gabriola Museum grounds contain examples of most of these species. Most are native to the island but the list includes several plants that are not native to the island but have naturalized here. The plants are listed alphabetically under their common names.

1. **Arbutus** (*Arbutus menziesii*) In the Heath family, this broad-leafed evergreen with the smooth red-orange bark and distinctive profile is found in Canada only in BC. It is nearing the northern limits of its range on Gabriola. Its presence is indicative of dry sites. It is frequently found in association with Douglas fir and Garry oak.
2. **Big-leaf maple** (*Acer macrophyllum*) a member of the Maple family, is a tall (up to 35 meters) and rapidly growing tree. It often appears on burned sites. The huge leaves turn yellow gold in the fall and make excellent compost. In Canada this maple is limited to southwestern BC.
3. **Bitter cherry** (*Prunus emarginata*) in the Rose family is a shrub or small tree that often acts as a pioneer species on disturbed areas. It blooms early in the spring and provides a large crop of small bright red cherries whose bitter taste does not seem to deter birds.
4. **Black hawthorn** (*Crataegus douglasii*) a small tree in the Rose family produces dark “little apples” loved by birds. It has formidable thorns ( up to 3 cm) which for early people had many uses ranging from fish hooks to tools for personal hygiene. It is distinguished from the common hawthorn, a cultivated European species which has deeply lobed leaves.
5. **Blackcap** (*Rubus leucodermis*) in the Rose family is actually a black raspberry; the fleshy fruit comes off the receptacle leaving the core exposed. The shrub canes have an attractive blueish bloom, but also have vicious curved prickles. Propagation can occur when the tip of a branch touches the soil where it may then take root and form a new shrub.
6. **Blue elderberry** (*Sambucus caerulea*), a member of the Honeysuckle family, is one of two elderberries found on the island. It grows in drier conditions than the red elderberry (#36) and has a flat topped mass of white flowers which produce pale blue fruits. These fruits are often used to flavor wine.

7. **Buffalo-berry** (*Sherpherdia canadensis*) is in the Oleaster family as is the well known European plant, Russian olive. Buffalo-berry is found in the drier woodlands on the south end of the island. It is well adapted to conserving moisture with its leathery leaves and dense branching. The orange fruits are bitter but edible.
8. **Cascara** (*Frangula purshiana*) a member of the Buckthorn family is a small attractive shade tolerant tree whose laxative value was well known to early peoples as well as modern day medicine. The tree is easily recognized by the distinctive oval leaves which are prominently veined and up to 12 cm long.
9. **Chokecherry** (*Prunus virginiana var. demissa*) is a member of the Rose family. It is relatively uncommon on Gabriola though much more widespread further east. Flowers and dark purple fruit hang in long clusters. A few bushes may be found in Drumbeg Park on the west-side trail.
10. **Common snowberry** (*Symphoricarpos albus*) in the Honeysuckle family is a common understory shrub that tolerates wide ranging conditions. The abundant snowy white berries displayed on its bare branches in winter appear to be floating when viewed against a dark forest backdrop.
11. **Douglas fir** (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) a member of the Pine family, differs botanically from the true firs. Oddly the generic name means false hemlock. Growing up to 90 meters tall, it is an important member of one of our most threatened ecosystems – the Coastal Douglas fir forest. This tree can live for a thousand years.
12. **Douglas maple** (*Acer glabrum var. douglasii*) is in the Maple family. This small tree is not common on Gabriola though it is widespread on Vancouver island. Its wood was sometimes used for snowshoe frames.
13. **Dull Oregon-grape** (*Mahonia nervosa*) is a small shrub in the Barberry family which is completely at home in shady woods. It has attractive yellow flowers in the spring and edible blue berries which can be made into jelly. This is a useful plant in home landscaping because of its exceptional drought and shade tolerance.
14. **English crabapple** (*Crataegus monogyna*) is a member of the Rose family. Introduced from Europe, and while not as widespread on Gabriola as in the Nanaimo area, there are some examples here. It is eye catching with delicate green foliage, showy white flowers and bright scarlet fruits that remain on the tree over winter.

- 15. Evergreen huckleberry** (*Vaccinium ovatum*) in the Heath family is one of our loveliest native shrubs. The dark evergreen saw-toothed leaves are oval shaped. They grow alternately on the twigs differentiating it from the Falsebox (# 17) with which it is sometimes confused. The evergreen huckleberry is one of the tastiest wild fruits.
- 16. Evergreen blackberry** (*Rubus laciniatus*) in the Rose family is one of the thorned invaders of the island. Less abundant than its cousin the Himalyan Blackberry (#23), it is well established and has tasty fruits. The leaf is nearly evergreen in this climate and cut into fine toothed segments which distinguishes this blackberry from the other.
- 17. Falsebox** (*Paxistima myrsinites*) is a member of the Staff-tree family and is related to the popular Burning Bush (*Euonymus alata*) used in landscaping. This shrub is evergreen however and less than a meter tall. It has small (4 mm) reddish flowers which bloom very early in the spring and are easy to miss. The attractive foliage is harvested for floral arrangements often to the detriment of this plant.
- 18. Garry oak** (*Quercus garryana*) in the Oak family is one of our most beautiful and important trees and is found mostly on the southwest part of Gabriola. The acorns were eaten by the early people after they soaked out the bitter tasting tannins. Grassy meadows often associated with this tree support stands of camas lilies also used as a food source by the Coast Salish people.
- 19. Grand fir** (*Abies grandis*) is in the Pine family. This stately tree with flat dark green needles is found growing in shady moist woods along with Western red cedar and Douglas fir. It is often mistakenly called “Balsam” due to its close similarity to that species.
- 20. Gummy gooseberry** (*Ribes lobbii*) in the Rose family has one of the most beautiful flowers among the gooseberries and currants. It looks more like a fuchsia than a gooseberry and is a favorite of hummingbirds. The “gummy” name comes from sticky glands on both sides of the leaves and on its hairy brownish fruits. There are also prickles – three spines per node. Currants don’t have spines.
- 21. Hairy manzanita** (*Arctostaphylos Columbiana*), in the Heath family, is one of Gabriola’s rarer shrubs. It prefers dry rocky outcrops and is mostly found on the south side of the island. Manzanita means “little apple” in Spanish, and the fruits of this plant do resemble small brownish apples. The grey-green foliage and mahogany coloured bark make this an attractive shrub.
- 22. Hardhack** (*Spirea douglasii* ssp. *Douglasii*) in the Rose family is found in dense stands in wet areas. It is hard to “hack” one’s way through this invasive shrub. The masses of pink flowers however make a lovely show.

- 23. Himalayan blackberry** (*Rubus discolor*) in the Rose family is one of the most delicious and useful fruits on the island, but one of the toughest plants to work with due to its rampant growth and sharp thorns. Like the Evergreen blackberry it is not native to this area, but is well established.
- 24. Indian plum** (*Oemleria cerasiformis*) in the rose family is one of the earliest shrubs to bloom on Gabriola. The greenish-white flowers have a distinctive scent and male and female flowers are found on separate plants. The small plum-like fruits are first orange then darken to purple, and are edible but bitter.
- 25. Kinnikinnick** (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) or Bearberry as it is also called, is in the Heath family and is a widespread ground cover across Canada often growing in slope- covering mats along highways. It is an excellent plant for the home landscaper. It has dark evergreen leaves, small pink bell-like flowers and red berries.
- 26. Labrador tea** (*Ledum groenlandicum*) in the Heath family is a plant of acid wetlands and bogs. Showy white flowers with long stamens contrast with the glossy dark evergreen leaves in spring and early summer. Early settlers and some of the native peoples used the leaves to brew a tea, but subsequently we have learned that the plant contains toxic compounds.
- 27. Little wild rose** (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) - in the Rose family is also called baldhip rose because its reddish orange hips have no attached sepals (greenish leaf-like parts usually under the showier petals). It is the smaller (1.5 m) of the two species of rose found on Gabriola and is more likely to be encountered in wooded areas than Nootka rose (# 30)
- 28. Media manzanita** (*Arctostaphylos x media*) in the Heath family is a naturally occurring hybrid between the hairy manzanita (# 21) and kinnikinnick (#25) having characteristics of both parents..
- 29. Mock orange** (*Philadelphus lewsi*) is in the Hydrangea family and is easily recognized when in bloom by its showy white and extremely fragrant flowers. It reaches a height of 3 meters, and its hard strong wood was used for arrows.
- 30. Nootka rose** (*Rosa Nootkana*) is the other common rose on Gabriola. It is usually larger than the baldhip rose (#27) with large pink to rose coloured fragrant flowers (4 – 8 cm). It is often found in ditches along roads where it makes a lovely sight when it blooms. The hips can be used to make preserves.
- 31. Ocean spray** (*Holodiscus discolor*) in the Rose family is so named for its creamy panicles of bloom in the spring which are apparently reminiscent of foam on the ocean. The multi-stemmed shrub can reach a height of 4 meters, and its very hard strong wood was used for many purposes including bows and arrows, spears, building pegs, roasting and digging sticks, and even knitting needles.

- 32. Pacific dogwood** (*Cornus nuttallii*) is in the Dogwood family. This attractive tree is often noticed in the spring with a show of white four petalled flowers. It is frequently affected with a virus which makes it difficult to grow in cultivated conditions. It has been hybridized with the eastern flowering dogwood to create “Eddie’s White Wonder” which is more resistant to the virus. The Terry Fox memorial plant is an “Eddie’s”.
- 33. Pacific hemlock** (*Tsuga heterophylla*) –this lovely tree in the Pine family reaches heights of 60 meters and often has a characteristic drooping leader at the top of the tree. The yellow green needles have a feathery look and the seed cones are unique in that they are only about 2 cm long.
- 34. Pacific ninebark** (*Physocarpus capitatus*) – another member of the Rose family, this four meter shrub has distinctive shredding bark and powder puffs of white flowers. Instead of berry like fruits, it has reddish bunches of dry seed capsules. The brown stems are covered with thin shredding bark which is distinctive.
- 35. Red alder** (*Alnus rubra*) is a member of the Birch family. This relatively short lived tree is a pioneer species and often forms pure dense stands on disturbed soil. A casual observer may be forgiven for mistaking a stand of red alder with its light grey bark for birch. The tree is able to extract nitrogen from the air due to bacteria which live in root nodules improving the surrounding soil for other plants. It is likely named for the red color of its wood.
- 36. Red elderberry** (*Sambucus racemosa*) in the Honeysuckle family, this fast growing shrub can reach 6 meters. It is more water loving than its blue-fruited relative (# 6). The bright red fruits of this plant can be eaten but must first be cooked to avoid nausea. The remaining parts of the plant contain toxic compounds.
- 37. Red-flowering currant** (*Ribes sanguineum*) in the Rose family is one of the best loved and showiest of our native flowering shrubs. It was transported back to England in 1827 by early botanist/explorer David Douglas where the showy pink to red flowers quickly found favor. When the first blooms open here on Gabriola the Rufous hummingbirds are soon to follow. The plant is sometimes found in a white flowering form.
- 38. Red huckleberry** (*Vaccinium parvifolium*) in the Heath family has unusual angled branches that are bright green. It often takes root in decaying stumps in coniferous woods. The red fruits while quite tart and very small were widely utilized by early people and were gathered by knocking or combing the berries into baskets.

- 39. Red-osier dogwood** (*Cornus sericea*) in the Dogwood family, this shrubby plant forms large thickets in wet areas. Unlike its more showy relative, the Pacific dogwood (# 32) , its small flowers form greenish white clusters and the small fruits called drupes are very bitter. The bare reddish stems are attractive in the winter.
- 40. Salal** (*Gaultheria shallon*) is a member of the Heath family, and our most common understory shrub on Gabriola. It is found in both dry and wet areas. Its dark evergreen leaves contrast with the small pink flowers on long stalks. The bland purple berries were an important fruit for early coastal inhabitants, eaten fresh or dried and are still enjoyed by people today .
- 41. Salmonberry** (*Rubus spectabilis*) in the Rose family was an important food source for early coastal people. They ate both the soft orange and yellow berries as well as the young sprouts which were peeled and steamed or eaten raw. One of the earliest shrubs to bloom, its showy magenta bell-like flowers promise the coming of spring.
- 42. Saskatoon** (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) in the Rose family is the well beloved berry of the Canadian prairies. Although the fruit produced here at the coast is generally considered inferior to the prairie grown, its fruits are greatly prized by local birds. The shrub in full bloom is a magnificent sight.
- 43. Scotch broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*)– is the scourge of Gabriola. It is a member of the Pea family and has spread widely over the island especially into disturbed areas. Once established it is difficult to remove. Although it is attractive, there are more desirable members of this family to grow. The planners of the museum native plant garden could not in good conscience introduce this aggressive plant.
- 44. Scouler’s willow** (*Salix scouleriana*) is in the willow family and will grow into a medium sized tree. Leaves are distinctive with a broad spatulate top tapering to a narrow base. The hairy catkins (pussy willows) appear before the leaves. It is one of several willows native to Gabriola.
- 45. Shore pine** (*Pinus contorta contorta*) is in the Pine family. This tree will reach 20 meters. It is closely related to Lodgepole pine which is taller and straighter. The cones of Shore pine release the seeds upon maturity while seeds of Lodgepole often wait until fire opens the cones.
- 46. Spurge-laurel** (*Daphne laureola*) in the Mezereon family, is an eastern European exotic that is becoming increasingly common on Gabriola, and has the potential to become a problem in our Garry oak ecosystem. It can tolerate deep shade, and the berries are distributed by birds which makes it difficult to control. Although attractive, it is quite toxic and can cause severe eye and skin irritation.

- 47. Tall Oregon-grape** (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is an eye-catching shrub in the Barberry family which resembles holly. This shrub is often found in dry, rocky sites in full sun and can reach three meters in height. The bright yellow flowers are fragrant and produce an abundant crop of edible blue berries which only need to be sweetened to be enjoyed. It makes a tasty jelly when combined with Salal berries (# 39).
- 48. Thimbleberry** (*Rubus parviflorus*) in the Rose family is one of the kindest of the fruiting shrubs; it doesn't have prickles. The showy white blossoms are larger than any of the other in the raspberry/blackberry group. This is in spite of its Latin name which means small or few. The fruit however is soft and not very flavorful. This shrub often forms dense thickets due to an extensive rhizome mat.
- 49. Trailing blackberry** (*Rubus ursinus*) also in the Rose family produces one of the best tasting berries in this group but is one of the most annoying plants. Its trailing stems are covered with sharp curved prickles that cut into unprotected hands and ankles often breaking off into the skin. Only the female plants bare fruit.
- 50. Western crabapple** (*Malus fusca*) is a small tree in the Rose family (12 meters). It prefers moist areas at the edges of streams or swamps. It has typical white or pinkish apple blossom flowers which are fragrant and produce small oval apples. The leaves often have distinctive irregular lobes, and colour nicely in the fall.
- 51. Western red cedar** (*Thuja plicata*) in the Cypress family is one of the most important and beautiful trees on the island. However the species has been noticeably declining in recent years likely due to recent hot dry summers. This tree has been of major importance for early and present day societies.
- 52. Western white pine** (*Pinus monticola*) in the Pine family has long soft needles in bundles of five as opposed to Shore Pine (# 45) whose needles are in bundles of two. The tree is subject to White pine blister rust which was introduced from Europe in the early 1900s and which kills most young trees. A few trees that appear to have some degree of resistance can be found on Gabriola.
- 53. Western yew** (*Taxus brevifolia*) is a small tree in the Yew family. Instead of typical cones that you might expect to find on this tree, its seed is enclosed in a fleshy red berry-like fruit (aril) which is eaten by birds but is poisonous to people. A drug called Taxol was derived from the bark and needles of this tree. At first there was concern that the species would be decimated but now the drug can be manufactured. in the laboratory.