



A quick A-Z guide to identifying common berries for the BTO Winter Thrushes Survey.

Below are some hints to help you identify the berries that wintering thrushes may be feeding on. Later in the season leaves may not be present on some of these species, making identification more challenging. This is not meant as a definitive guide, and there are many other species of berry-bearing plant found in the countryside. If you are in any doubt about the identification of a berry-bearing plant, we recommend you refer to a fieldguide, or you could look at pictures of these species on the internet (try typing the plant name into Google, for instance.)



Bramble (Blackberry)

Rubus fruticosus agg.

The familiar blackberry fruit, ingredient in so many pies. Found on low-growing, thorny briars which twine aggressively through hedges, woodland and gardens.



Blackthorn (Sloe)

Prunus spinosa

Marble-sized, deep purple, bitter fruits with a distinctive white 'bloom' on the skin, sometimes used to make sloe gin. Very thorny common hedgerow shrub or tree.



Buckthorn

Rhamnus catharticus

A common, spined, hedgerow plant, with distinctive leaf veins that curve in towards the midrib. Small black berries are arranged in whorls around and along the branches.



Cotoneaster

Cotoneaster sp.

A very frequent garden shrub, occasional escape and rare wild plant. Abundant unstalked, small berries and, usually, small leaves on spineless twigs. Compact shrub or tree.



Dogwood

Cornus sanguinea

A common chalk soil shrub. Highly distinctive red bare twigs in winter. It can be the dominant species in some habitats. Small black berries occur as clusters at the end of twigs.



Elder (Elderberry)

Sambucus nigra

Frequent small tree, generally on calcareous soils. Favourite of wine makers, with hanging umbrellas of tiny black fruit on brittle arching branches. Distinctive leaves with 5-7 leaflets.



Guelder Rose

Viburnum opulus

To 4m, but usually much less, on damp soils, often under woodland. Clusters of small, bright red berries are held at the end of branches with distinctive-shaped leaves.





Hawthorn (May/Haws)
Crataegus monogyna
A familiar, spiny hedgerow shrub with lobed leaves and flat-topped, edible, red berries (haws). There can be so many they make the plant look red from a distance.



Holly
Ilex aquifolium
The well-known, evergreen Christmas symbol. Prickly, hard, dark green leaves surround small, red berries held in bunches close to the stem.



Honeysuckle (Woodbine)
Lonicera periclymenum
A favourite scented climber, occurring naturally as a straggling plant in woodland, denser in scrub and hedges. Small clusters of sticky red berries are held at the end of the stems.



Ivy
Hedera helix
Well-known, very common, evergreen climbing plant, with abundant clusters of flat-topped berries, initially green but turning black as they ripen.



Privet
Ligustrum vulgare
Common as a heavily-clipped hedging plant, but grows wild in woods and on banks. Small, black, poisonous berries are held in pyramidal clusters above small, persistent leaves.



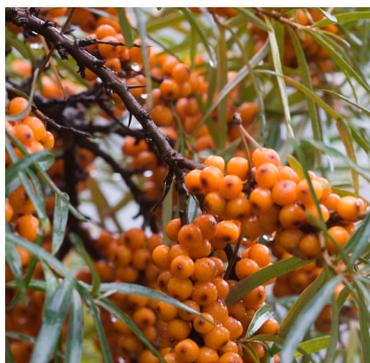
Pyracantha (Firethorn)
Pyracantha coccinea
Popular garden shrub, occasionally escaping into the wild. Pyracantha becomes absolutely covered with masses of small, long-stemmed, orangey-red berries.



Rose (Dog/Wild Rose)
Rosa sp.
Edible hips from a large range of wild rose species. Hips can be bunched or solitary, on spiny or, more usually, hook-thorned arching stems. In hedges and deep woodland.



Rowan (Mountain Ash)
Sorbus aucuparia
Often a slender tree, sometimes growing in isolation, especially at altitude. In autumn, large pinnate leaves surround profuse, domed, heavy clusters of berries.



Sea Buckthorn
Hippophae rhamnoides
Orange berries crowding in amongst long, narrow greyish-green leaves. Naturally found close to the sea, even with salt spray, but now often planted in urban developments.



Spindle
Euonymus europaeus
Wacky colour combination of bright pink four-part capsules with orange berries within. Frequent small tree on calcareous soils, often in hedges or woods.



Whitebeam
Sorbus aria

A less familiar medium-sized tree, usually on chalk, with large oval leaves, furry white below. Scarlet berries held in terminal clusters, either upright or slightly hanging.



Yew
Taxus baccata

A large, evergreen tree, famous from churchyards, but found on chalk naturally in the south. Very poisonous dark seeds are surrounded by edible, fleshy, red aril.

Some other berries and fruits to look out for

Apple (Crab Apple) *Malus sylvestris* Small (crab) to medium (cultivated) familiar apple-shaped fruits. Frequent in hedges and wood edges. Fruit can vary in colour from greeny-yellow through to red-tinged.

Bird Cherry *Prunus padus* A small tree of the north and west (and East Anglia) with small (for a cherry), shiny, bitter black fruit held in hanging, descending clusters. Bark of the tree has a strong, foetid smell.

Cherry *Prunus avium* Medium-sized tree of woodland and hedges. Fruit the familiar cherry, hanging in pairs or trios, although usually smaller than the cultivated varieties. Fruits usually red, but can be darker or even yellow.

Currant *Ribes* sp. Another familiar fruit. Small shrubs with palmate leaves, can grow in deep woodland. Small, highly fragrant fruit occur in sparse drooping clusters. Most frequent is the Redcurrant although Blackcurrant and others occur throughout the country.

Mistletoe *Viscum album* A Christmas necessity, this is a parasitic non-woody plant, found growing high on usually Apple and Poplar trees. Leaves are a sickly looking yellowy-green and the plant can be seen from long distances when leaves are off the trees. Small, white, sticky berries cluster close to the stalks.

Plum *Prunus domestica* Frequent in hedges, often near houses, Wild Plum can have yellowish/green (Greengage) or the more traditional purple, egg-shaped, familiar delicious fruit.

Raspberry *Rubus idaeus* Less of a thug than its relative the Bramble, Raspberry is often a tall weedy suckering plant, with brighter green, less robust Bramble-shaped leaves and the familiar red fruit hides shyly beneath in small numbers.

Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis* Unfamiliar tall tree, similar to Whitebeam, but leaves are toothed and fruit is a distinctive cluster of brownish, small, pear-shaped fruits.

Acknowledgements. Many thanks to the photographers: Dawn Balmer, Neil Calbrade, Anne Cotton, Rob Fuller, Nick Moran, John Morris, Dorian Moss, Andy Musgrove, Jill Pakenham, Rob Robinson and Franz Xaver. Text and layout by Su Gough.

