

Actaea pachypoda White Baneberry, Doll's Eyes

Identification

You're more likely to notice white baneberry in the late summer and fall, when the white berries are conspicuous. Held above the foliage on red stems, the white berries are marked with a black dot in the center like the eyes of porcelain dolls. That's where the common name Doll's Eyes comes from. White baneberry grows to about two



feet tall. Look for the two or three large, compound leaves. Each leaf is divided into three leaflets, and the leaflets themselves are serrated. The flowers are shaped like short, white bottlebrushes. Each flower in the bottlebrush has one pistil and lots of yellow-tipped stamens surrounded by tiny petals. White baneberry, like its close relatives red baneberry and mountain

bugbane, is in the buttercup or Ranunculus family. Look for it in rich woodland soil and deep shade.

Natural History

White baneberry is one of those plants best admired from afar – all parts of this plant should be considered poisonous. The berries, however, seem to pose the most threat. The Cherokee, Blackfoot, Meskwaki, Iroquois, and Chippewa used minute amounts of root tea to cure various ailments from urinary tract infections to headaches caused by eye-strain. Modern medicine, however, councils us to stay well away from this woodland treasure.

Conservation

If its poisonous nature isn't enough to deter you from disturbing white baneberry, consider its dwindling population. White baneberry is endangered in Florida and considered exploitably vulnerable in New York.