CENTRE FOR BOREAL RESEARCH TECHNICAL NOTE #47 PLANT AND SEED TECHNOLOGIES - AUGUST 2023

Rhododendron groenlandicum

NAME NOTE: Current name is *Rhododendron groenlandicum*, previously accepted name was *Ledum groenlandicum*.

COMMON NAMES: Labrador tea, Common Labrador Tea, Bog Labrador Tea, Greenland Labrador Tea

FAMILY: Ericaceae

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

GENERAL ID

Labrador tea is a fragrant evergreen shrub 5that is typically 50-150 cm tall (2). New shoots come from the base of the flower (7). Bark is hairy, and orange, red, or light brown.

LEAVES

Leaves are alternate (7). Narrowly linear to oval and typically 1-5 cm long (8). Leathery thick leaves. Dark green with flat veins on the top side of the leaf and rusty reddish-brown underside with woolly hairs. Margins of the leaf rolled under (2).



Figure 2. Top side of leaf.



Figure 1. The leaves with a rusty woolly underside.



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HABITAT

Moist areas such as bogs, swamps, muskegs, and moist parts of the woods. Also found in nutrient poor upland soils, common in the understory of pine stands. (3). Labrador tea is an indicator of acidic, nutrient poor soils and is widespread across the boreal. (5)



FLOWERING

White flowers that bloom in clusters at the tip of the branch (3). 5 petals that are about 0.5 cm in diameter, 5-7 stamens (5). Flowers late May to early June. Self-pollinated, cross pollinated or wind pollinated (8).



FRUIT

The fruit is 5-7mm long, brownish green to pink, covered in fine hair, shaped like an elongated oval at the end of the branches in clusters (8).



LOOKS LIKE

- Rhododendron tomentosum which was previously named Ledum palustre (Marsh Labrador Tea) (5). Rhododendron tomentosum is shorter (30-60 cm), with narrower and more tightly curled leaves (4). Usually, 10 stamens per flower as opposed to 5-7 stamens per flower for Rhododendron groenlandicum. (5)
- Andromeda polifolia (Bog Rosemary) and Kalmia polifolia (Northern Bog Laurel) are both species that may look like *Rhododendron groenlandicum* before flowering. Andromeda polifolia and Kalmia polifolia have a white underside (3). *Rhododendron groenlandicum* and *Rhododendron tomentosum* are distinguished by a reddish woolly underside. The young leaves at the top of Andromeda polifolia may have whitish hairs until mature, check the lower leaves for identification.
- 3. *Rhododendron neoglandulosum* (Western Labrador Tea, Glandular Labrador Tea) - which is differentiated by its leaves having stalks, and the small shining resin granules below rather than the rusty woolly underside.



SEED

The mature seed is 2-3mm long, golden yellow to light brown and needle-shaped.



SEED EXTRACTION

Seed can be extracted from fully open capsules immediately using soil sieves. Partially open capsules should be laid out on a tray at room temperature to allow them to fully open prior to seed extraction. The capsules can also be gently rubbed to remove the seeds.

Sieving capsules to extract seed.

SEED STORAGE

According to the Alberta Tree Improvement and Seed Centre, seeds should be placed into cold storage when they are sufficiently dry, 4-8% moisture content or 15-25% ERH @ 20-30C (1). For the greatest longevity store seed in a -20C freezer, if seeds are to be used right away a 4C fridge will suffice

SEED COLLECTION

Seed scouting in August. Seed harvest from the end of August to October. Seed capsules can be harvested by hand picking or clipping and collected into a bucket or directly into a paper bag. Store seed capsules in paper bags and keep cool in the field. If capsules are very ripe and fully open, capsules/branches can be shaken into buckets or paper bags to collect just the seeds.



Good to know: When very ripe, seed falls readily form pods. Hravest carefully by placing tarps/bags under the plant, or by shaking seed pods directly in bags.



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