



Berry Picking in Alaska's Interior

Berries are found throughout the interior of Alaska. Most berries are ripe enough to eat in late summer to early fall. Here are some of the most popular berries in the area. For others, consult a local field guide.

Blueberry *Vaccinium uliginosum*

Blueberries grow on low growing shrubs. Look for them in tundra, open woods, above timberline and in low lying bogs. They are also found in many old burned areas.



Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*

Raspberries grow on woody, prickly shrubs. Look for them in thickets and forest edges. Plants thrive in disturbed areas such as wooded paths, train tracks and fence lines.



Low-Bush Cranberry *Vaccinium vitis idaea*

Cranberries grow on low evergreen plants with waxy leaves. Look for them in rocky or peaty forest soils. The best time to collect is after the first frost.



High-Bush Cranberry *Viburnum edule*

High-Bush cranberries grow on waist-high stalks and are often harvested after fall frosts. Look for them in woods and meadows. Beware! Deadly poisonous bane berries can sometimes be mistaken for high bush cranberries. Make sure you know the difference before you go picking.



Northern Red Currant *Ribes triste*

Currants grow on short shrubs in forested areas. The berries hang down from stems like earrings. Currants are very sour tasting but make great jams and jellies.



Berry Picking 101 *A Crash Course in Recreational Berry Picking in Alaska's Interior*

Caution

Beware of the deadly-toxic baneberry while berrypicking in Alaska. Baneberry plants grow in meadows and have toothed-compound leaves. The berries grow in clusters and are colored red or white with black dots at their ends.



Be able to identify baneberries before going berry picking in Alaska.

Around Fairbanks:

Ester and Murphy Dome:

- Blueberries and Cranberries
- From the top of the domes, follow side trails to the south sides and look for bushes.

Goldstream Valley:

- Blueberries
- Take Ballaine Road and look for signs for the public Blueberry preserve.

Birch Hill:

- Cranberries
- Follow the cross country ski trails in the wooded area. Look for bushes in the understory.

Chena Lakes:

- Blueberries, Raspberries, Cranberries
- The bike path around the lake is a great place to find blueberry and cranberry bushes. Raspberry bushes grow along the river near the boat launch.

- Remember that berries provide necessary food for many birds and animals. Pick only what you will use and don't pick all the fruit from one tree.

- Keep in mind that many berries are eaten by animals that don't like people in their territory. If confronted, it is up to you to move and find another berry patch.

- After picking, berries should be washed and dried. If you are going to freeze them for the winter, place them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze before placing in a container.

- The cooperative extension has some excellent information on preserving berries and making jellies or jams. These tips can be found at <http://www.uaf.edu/ces/publications/index.html>

Chena River State Recreation Area:

- Blueberries and Cranberries
- In the Chena River State Recreation Area, you will find low lying areas just off the road. Look for blueberry bushes along the Granite Tors and Angel Rocks trails. Cranberries can be found in the wooded areas.

Steese Highway:

Pedro Dome:

- Blueberries
- Take the Steese Highway north to mile 20. Pedro Dome Road is on the left. At the top of the dome, look for berry bushes in an old burn.

Nome Creek:

- At mile 57, take US Creek Rd. back to Nome Creek Valley. A forest fire has burned much of the area, but in the low lying places along the creek, you will find berry bushes.

Elliot Highway:

Olmes Pond:

- Blueberries, Cranberries
- Look for bushes along path around the pond.

Summit Trail:

- Blueberries
- Hike to the first summit. You will find bushes along the trail. Watch for bears in the brushy areas.



Bears love berries! Remember to follow good bear safety practices while berry picking.