

WINTERGREEN BERRY (*Gaultheria procumbens*)



Known as Winterberry, Checkerberry or Teaberry, this low growing plant with dark shiny leaves never gets much taller than a couple of inches. Checkerberry is common throughout New Hampshire because it likes the acid soil under pines and hardwoods. Break a leaf or crush a berry and smell it. The aroma you smell is the chemical methyl salicylate or oil of wintergreen. The plant is believed to make this substance as a protection against herbivorous insects.

These small plants were once the commercial source of oil of wintergreen, as was black and yellow birch, but now the oil is prepared synthetically. The aromatic berries are edible and are enjoyed by wild turkey, ruffed grouse, chipmunk and deer as well as humans. The stems you see are probably all part of one plant. Each stem is connected to a long branching rhizome, a system of root-like growths that runs just beneath the surface of the soil. Please don't pull up these little plants; their berries make a big difference to the survival of wildlife.