BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Common Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)

Plant Family: Rose

Flower clusters blooming in May or June are attractive to pollinators.

Capable of growing in dry or moist soils, ninebark is a shrub well suited to the edge of waterways where conditions may change rapidly from wet to dry. Ninebark is also useful as a windbreak, field border, and for reclaiming degraded soils. Its dense, arching branches provide wildlife structure and its flowers attract a variety of pollinators and other insects in early spring. Caterpillars, beetles and other insects that are important for supporting bird populations also use ninebark as a food source.

Wetland Indicator Status:
Great Plains - FAC
Midwest - FACW
NCNE - FACW

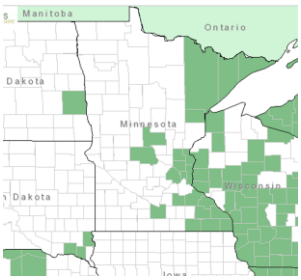
Arching branches help with identification of this shrub.

Identification

Ninebark prefers full sun to partial shade, has arching branches and can grow up to ten feet tall. Its bark peels off in papery layers, hence the common name "ninebark". Its flowers have five white petals and grow in flat clusters, blooming in May or June. The flowers turn into a bladder shaped fruit later in the summer. Its alternately arranged leaves are commonly divided into three lobes and have rounded teeth. Two small, pointed stipules can be found at the base of leaf stalks. Leaves can turn a purplish color in fall when they are growing in full sun and soils conditions that are not overly wet.

Flaky bark and divided leaves.

Range



Range based on University of MN Herbarium data.

Within Minnesota the species is most common in southeast counties but has been planted statewide for wildlife and as horticultural varieties in home landscapes. The species is found across most of the eastern half of the United States and Canada. It most commonly grows along streams and rivers, in lowland forests, floodplains, and field edges. *Physocarpus opulifolius* is the only species of its genus in Minnesota. There are two varieties recognized in the state, *var. intermedius* with starry shaped hairs on the fruit and *var. opulifolius* with no hairs on the fruit.

Uses

Ninebark can provide a good source of nectar and pollen for a variety of pollinators including butterflies, native bees, honey bees, wasps and native flies. Its dense growth form provides quality nesting cover for songbirds and winter cover for wildlife species such as pheasants, quail, grouse, rabbits and songbirds. Many of these species also use the seeds of ninebark as a food source. Its dense growth also makes it well suited for windbreaks and an alternative to buckthorn for screening in urban areas. With extensive fibrous roots and a tolerance to wet or dry soils, the species is effective at stabilizing streambanks and shorelines where it can compete successfully with reed canary grass and other aggressive species.

Planting Recommendations

Planting Methods
- Seed
- Containerized Plants
- Bare root

This species can be installed as seed, containerized plants or transplants. Its seed does not require pre-stratification and should be lightly worked into the soil in spring or fall. Mowing of weeds above the seedlings may be needed to promote growth during the spring and summer. Transplanting should be done in early spring or late fall when plants are dormant and there is good soil moisture. Both containerized plants and transplants may need some watering the first year to aid establishment.

Similar Species

High Bush Cranberry (Viburnum opulus var. americana) has divided leaves that can look similar to ninebark but it has opposite leaves and does not have flaky bark.

Gooseberry and Currants (Ribes sp.) leaves can look similar to ninebark but most gooseberries and currants have prickles on some portion of the plants, and lack flaking layers of bark. They also tend to have a shorter height.

References

Illinois Wildflowers http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/ninebark.htm
USDA Pants Database: http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=PHOP