

The Hardy Black Chokeberry

(Editors Note: This article is the third of a series exploring plants and horticulture on Maine's Mt Desert Island and Acadia National Park.)

Hiking is one of the more popular activities in Acadia National Park (ANP) and it is not difficult to find a trail that has interesting sights and challenges. Regardless of the route, plant life flourishes. In my previous article, I talked about some of the plants on the trails that led to the higher elevations. But for those who don't want to climb or want to mix in a horticulture trek with the ocean experience, the park has trails just for you.

Many of us in Pennsylvania head to the shores between New York to North Carolina to take our summer beach vacations. Here, the beaches are mostly sand. Not so on Mt. Desert Island, where the shore is rock. There are several easy trails, such as the Ocean Path, that hug the coastline and give breathtaking views of the Atlantic Ocean pounding the craggy coastline. Even here, plants find footholds to occupy oceanside niches.

In the rock crevices, where soil has accumulated, black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) thrives. Nothing unique there as its native host range stretches from Canada down to Georgia and all the way over to the Mississippi River. In our landscapes and natural habitat, it is a shrub that reaches 4–8 feet in height. But the harsh environment (shallow rooting depth, constant winds, etc.) create a stunted plant that just peaks above crevice openings. During the month of June, the compact plant is smothered with 5-petal blossoms (with pink stamens) rising above the shiny dark green leaves. This later gives away to a black, shiny berry.

This dwarfing look can be replicated in our landscapes. Dr. Mark Brand, University of Connecticut, released the cultivar Low Scape Mound Aronia that mimics the growth at ANP. It reaches a height of eighteen inches and spreads about 3 feet. The plant patent describes it as 'profuse flowering'. The leaves are much smaller than the native species and turn an attractive red/orange color in the fall. A great plant to add to your edible landscape with the late season fruit. Landscapers are utilizing it as groundcovers, edging, and in containers.

And just like the harsh conditions on ANP's shoreline rocks, this new release is just as hardy. Proven Winners, licensed to grow Low Scape Mound states "Sun, part shade, wet, dry, hot or cold—it takes it all in stride without skipping a beat".

Caption:

Chokeberry1 – Chokeberry finds a toehold on the Acadia National Park's rocky shoreline. Off in the distance is the Atlantic Ocean.

Coastline – a wide view of the rocky coastline within Acadia National Park. If examined closely, one can see the green patches on the rocks – small stands of black chokeberry