

Huckleberry, Garden — *Solanum melanocerasium* All.¹

James M. Stephens²

Garden huckleberry (*S. nigrum* var. *quineense*; also *S. melanocerasum* All.) is an edible form of the common nightshade weed plant. Garden huckleberry is also known as quonderberry, wonderberry, sunberry, moralle, morella, petty morel, solanberry, black berried nightshade, and houndsberry.

Since garden huckleberry is a member of the Solanaceae (nightshade) family and a close relative of the common nightshade (*S. nigrum* L.), there often is some confusion. Common nightshade is also called black nightshade, poisonberry, garden nightshade, and sometimes deadly nightshade.

Whereas common nightshade is reported to be poisonous, the **garden huckleberry** appears to be relatively safe. They should not be confused with the true deadly nightshade, *S. dulcamara* L. and *Atropa belladonna* L., both having very poisonous levels of alkaloids.

DESCRIPTION

The garden huckleberry plant resembles a sprawling, 2½ foot tall bell pepper bush. Its leaves are pepper-like, from 3-7 inches long, pointed, and medium green. The leaf stems are 1-3 inches long. Clusters of about six small white flowers are borne along the main stems, followed shortly by ½ inch in diameter berries that are green when immature and black when mature, resembling wild huckleberries. Berries are filled with a greenish pulp, mixed with small pale yellow seeds.



Figure 1.

USE

Berries are eaten when ripe and sometimes unripe. They have the flavor of a bitter tomato. Berries are used for making preserves, pies, or cooked dishes. Leaves are reported to be high in methionine, with a total protein content of 4-6%. They are cooked and eaten as a potherb.

CULTURE

Garden huckleberry has been grown in gardens successfully all around Florida. In garden demonstration trials at Gainesville, plants were seeded in September and yielded hundreds of ripe berries from late October through November.

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Garden huckleberry should be grown much like a pepper plant. Sow seeds about 1-inch deep at a time, which will allow the plant to grow and mature in warm weather since it is susceptible to cold injury. Space plants 12 to 24 inches apart. It may be transplanted, and a start may be obtained from a cutting. Mulch such as black plastic is useful in its culture, but not necessary. Pests were not a problem in the Gainesville trials.