

## Huckleberry Picking

Huckleberry picking can be enjoyed as a solitary experience or as a group activity for the entire family. The Clearwater Valley area has some very good huckleberries. Getting there is half the fun. Enjoy the outing!!

Many factors such as elevations, ripening seasons and climate contribute to a good berry site. The best berry picking is usually found along abandoned logging roads, and in old bums. The berry bushes found in these areas have a lot of sunlight and little competition for nutrients.

Unfavorable weather conditions can completely wipe out a crop of huckleberries, such as not enough rain, too much rain, a late freeze, a hail storm that occurs when berries are just forming on the bushes, and not enough sunshine.

When venturing into the forest for a day of berry picking, remember, bears like them too. If they think you are imposing on "their berry territory", there may be problems. It is wise to retreat from any bears should the 'situation' present itself. This berry is one of the primary foods for the grizzly and black bear. The berries are very high in carbohydrates, and an abundant crop assures the bear's survival through the winter months when they are hibernating.

**HUCKLEBERRY (Vaccinium Membranacelim)**

**Other Common Names**

Blueberry, Big Whortleberry, Black Huckleberry, Bilberry.

**Description:**

The huckleberry is a low erect shrub, ranging from 1-5' tall. The flowers are shaped like tiny pink or white urns, which blossom in June and July, depending on elevation. The leaves are short, elliptical and alternate on the stems. The bush turns brilliant red and sheds its leaves in the fall. The stem bark is reddish (often yellowish-green in shaded sites). The shape of the berry varies from round to oval and the color varies from purplish black to wine-colored red. Some species have a dusky blue covering called bloom. The berries taste sweet and tart, in the same proportions.

**Ripening Season: July-August**

Early in the season, by mid-July, the berries on sunny southern facing slopes and lower elevations are first to ripen. They are most succulent in mid-summer. However, good picking can generally be found as late as October on north-facing slopes.

**Habitat:**

Coniferous forests in open to shaded sites where there are acidic soils. They can be found at elevations ranging from 2,000 - 9,000 feet in the Rocky Mountains. The best sites are those that can support Douglas-fir, alpine fir and lodgepole pine trees in abundant sunlight. The best picking is usually found in areas opened up from forest fires, on trails through fir stands and timber cuts, or along old roads.