



***Gaultheria procumbens* L.**
Wintergreen, Teaberry

Ericaceae (Heath Family)

Blooming season: July-August

Plant:

Semi-woody, 5-15 cm high.
Creeping or subterranean stems.
Leaves borne only at tops of its upright shoots.

Leaves:

Alternate, thick, evergreen, 1-4.5 cm long..
Dark green above, paler below.
“Serrate with low bristle-tipped teeth” (House 1923 p 209).
Strong wintergreen smell and taste.



Flower:

White or slightly pink urn-shaped, 6-9.5 mm long.
5 joined petals with recurved tips.
Usually solitary in axils.
5 stamens.

Fruit:

Red, berry-like, 0.75-1.25 mm, somewhat indented at top.
Ripens late autumn, remaining on plant and becoming juicier in spring.
Berry white when immature.
Edible, though mealy; very spicy.

Can be confused with:

Partridgeberry, which has opposite leaves, and whose berries have two “eyes”.

Geographic range:

Type specimen location:
State: Throughout.
Regional: Newfoundland - Manitoba, south to Georgia, Alabama, Minnesota.



***Gaultheria procumbens* L.**
Wintergreen, Teaberry

2

Habitat:

Local: riparian

Regional: Prefers sandy soils; dry woodlands, although frequent in low woods.

Common local companions:

Oaks, partridgeberry, red maple, and witch-hazel.

Usages:

Human: Native Americans used leaves medicinally in teas for pain relief of arthritis, asthma, and as an antiseptic and as a regular tea. Colonists learned to use it for those purposes, and also added it to root beer recipes. The berries have been eaten as a relish. The more common use of the plant, however, has been as a source of wintergreen oil from both the leaves and berries, this being used in the past and the present in external preparations for relief of arthritis and as a flavoring. Currently, both synthetic forms and oils from a birch, *Betula lenta*, are more commonly used; the active ingredient is methyl salicylate. It has also been used as an urinary tract astringent, to treat urinary tract infections and as a treatment for inflammation of the kidneys. (Tilford, 1998)¹

Animal: Berries are eaten by ruffed grouse, and leaves and berries by deer.

Why is it called *that*?

The plant was named *Gaultheria*, by Peter Kalm, in honor of Dr. Gaultier, a physician and botanist living in Quebec in the middle of the 18th century. *Procumbens* is the Latin for prostrate, referring to its stems (but not its shoots). Wintergreen refers to the plant's evergreen leaves.

Prepared by: Barbara Lukacs Grob December 2007

¹Revised by: Hope Buell October 2010

Works Cited

¹Tilford, G. L. (1998). *From Earth to Herbalist* (pp. 1-159). Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company.