

November EcoQuest – Searching for Snowberries

As we enter late fall and most plants go dormant, it gets trickier to identify species. It might feel as if quests for native flora will have to rest until spring, but some species stand out this time of year! Braving a wintry walk may bring into focus plants such as snowberry, which can be spotted even in the late fall and winter months due to their white berries that persist into the colder months.

Snowberries have ecological and ethnobotanical importance. For birds and small mammals, the berries serve as important winter food, while the woody shrubbery provides important habitat. Ethnobotanically, these species were used for a variety of purposes by Native Americans, from hair soap to tonics and eyewashes. However, these fruits are poisonous when consumed outside of small amounts.

Snowberries, known scientifically as the *Symphoricarpos* genus, are in the honeysuckle family, or Caprifoliaceae. Species in this family are often woody and have opposite leaves, pithy stems and twin flowers and fruits. *Symphoricarpos* contain species that are small deciduous shrubs,

with opposite leaves and bell-shaped pink to white flowers. “*Symphoricarpos*” is from the Greek “*symphorein*” meaning “born together,” and “*karpos*” meaning “fruit,” referring to the closely packed berries.

In Colorado there are three common species in the *Symphoricarpos* genus: western snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*), common snowberry (*S. albus*) and mountain snowberry (*S. rotundifolius*). These species can be challenging to tell apart and they often occupy similar habitats. It’ll be tricky to identify to the species level without all the

plant parts present—so take good pictures of the remaining berries, stem and leaves. Bring along a key or field guide.

This November, turn your winter hike into a scientific exploration by searching for snowberries! Help Denver Botanic Gardens document *Symphoricarpos* in the greater metro area by photographing as many as possible in the month of November. Post your findings to [iNaturalist](#) so they will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.



Symphoricarpos, Photo by Sue Janssen

Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the city via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the [iNaturalist](#) app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”



4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area’s flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.