

Cranberry hibiscus (*Hibiscus acetosella*, false roselle, African rosemallow)

It is a striking and colorful plant with red leaves that resemble a maple leaf. It tends to grow so tall it straggles all over the place because its slender branches bend right over from the weight of its leaves. Prune it when it is young by pinching out the growing tips to encourage it to form a dense bush. Cut it to the base after it has finished blooming and it will usually grow a second year. It can be grown as a border or hedge plant - its dramatic purple leaves contrasting nicely with plants that have paler green leaves.



- Zones 8-11
- Mature Height/Spread 4-6 (10) feet
- Mature Form Wild & rangy if not pruned: a dense bush if well pruned
- Growth Rate Rapid
- Sun Exposure Full Sun
- Soil Requirements 6.1 to 6.5 (mildly acidic)
- Soil Type All kinds of soil as long as it is well-drained
- Water Fairly drought tolerant
- Leaves Burgundy to bronze-green
- Flower Color Pink
- Bloom Time Late Fall/Early Winter
- Propagation Cuttings or seed. Seeds can be dried on plants and collected (wear gloves to protect hands when handling seeds)
- Pests/Diseases It is nematode and insect resistant



It does best in full sun to light shade and has rose pink hollyhock-like flowers that open for a few hours at midday mostly in the fall. If kept pruned, it makes a lovely hedge or shrub.

The leaves are pleasantly tart and can be eaten in salads and stir fries. They retain their red color even after cooking. Because the leaves are a bit mucilaginous (slimy), they are best used in smaller quantities and cooked only for a short time.

Hibiscus sabdariffa is a sister species whose calyx (the sepals of the flower) is widely eaten throughout Africa. The calyx of cranberry hibiscus is not fleshy and is not eaten.

Hibiscus Drink

In Central America the flowers are blended with ice, sugar, lemon or lime juice and water to make a purple lemonade. Collect about thirty blossoms at dusk after they have folded. The petals add a bright red color rather than any special flavor.

Bring 6 cups of water to a boil and remove from heat.

Add about 30 fresh blossoms or 4 oz. dried hibiscus flowers and steep, covered.

When cool, add sugar to taste, and ½ cup fresh squeezed lime or lemon juice.

Serve chilled with or without ice.



Resources

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/roselle.html#Food%20Uses>

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com>

<http://www.hibiscus.org>

<http://www.vegweb.com/frames/food/drink/2066.shtml>