



# “Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays  
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



## Solanum Nigrum (Common or Black Nightshade)

Published October 8, 2021

In June, I told you about Bittersweet Nightshade which is in fact quite deadly. We can close the chapter on these plants after first looking at Black Nightshade which, though also called Deadly Nightshade, really isn't.

Let me turn you over to an anonymous author in "eattheweeds". (Have I mentioned I love the internet?)

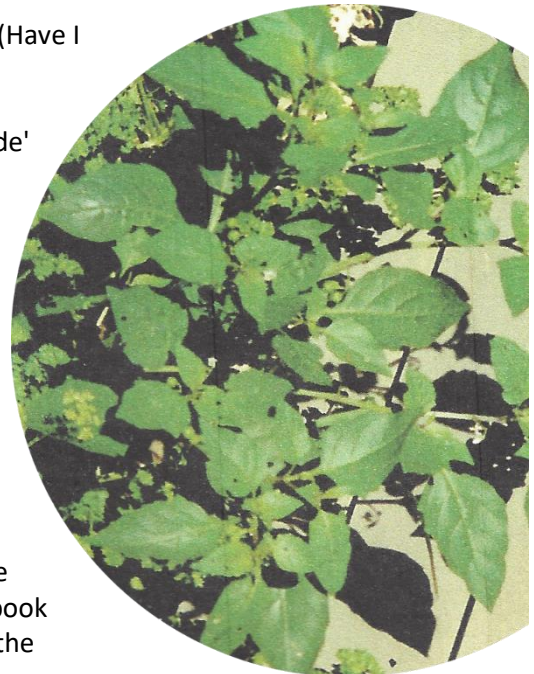
“Anyone who's done some foraging has seen the 'Black Nightshade' also called 'Common Nightshade' and (DRUM ROLLLLLLLLL) the Deadly Nightshade. It's one to four feet tall, oval to diamond shaped leaves, with or without large blunt teeth, little white star-like flowers with yellow cores followed by green berries that turn shiny black, larger than a BB, smaller than a pea. Some foraging books will tell you it is very edible and the dangers overrated; some say it will kill you, don't eat it. I land on the edible side and I eat it.

“But, to cover myself legally because there are a lot of fools with lawyers, I am not suggesting you eat any part of any wild nightshade. In fact, let me include what soon-to-be PhD and author Delena Tull writes in her book *Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest*.

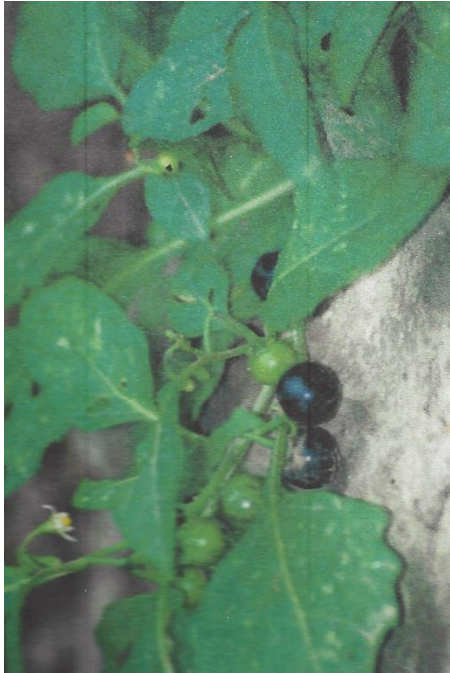
“The toxicity of the species is quite variable in different varieties and in different parts of the world. Euell Gibbons reports using the ripe berries in pies and numerous other references indicate that the ripe cooked fruit may be safe. Personally, I consider the whole plant potentially deadly and leave it alone.’ “

Its erect angular, branching stem grows 1 to 2 feet high and may be glabrous or covered with inward bent hairs. The leaves are alternate, dark green, ovate, wavy-toothed or nearly entire. Drooping, lateral umbel-like clusters of white or pale violet flowers appear from July to October. The fruit is a many-seeded, pea-sized, purple or black berry.  
[Medicinal Herb Info]

When Europeans arrived, they saw the native nightshades. Because they



resembled the Black Nightshades in the Old World, they were considered variations of the Old World Nightshades and were called – Black Nightshades – all of them. But as time passed botanists had different opinions and the names were changed. Every botanist with an opinion, it seems, called these plants what they thought they should be called. What was once thought of as varieties of one native in North America (*S. nigrum*) became many plants with many names. Then even more careful botanists got rid of some of the names and said they weren't Black Nightshades at all and were not Old World variations. In fact, some think the *S. americanum* isn't even a native but came from Australia. On top of that, the Old World plant, the original Black Nightshade, became naturalized in North America as well. . . Even the pro's profess confusion though I think they caused it. Native people had it sorted out well long before there were botanists.



“There is no doubt Solanum family has toxic members. And the green berries of the plants mentioned here are toxic. They have killed a few children and at least one adult within record keeping.

Common Nightshade is an annual plant found along gardens and old walls and fences in various parts of the U.S. and southern Canada.

Taken internally in very small amounts, the leaves strongly promote perspiration and purge the bowels the next day. The juice of the fresh herb is sometimes used for fever or to allay pain. In large doses, black nightshade can cause serious but not usually fatal poisoning. Externally, the juice or an ointment prepared from the leaves can be used for skin problems, cancers or tumors. The berries are poisonous but boiling them apparently destroys the toxic substances and makes them usable for preserves, jams and pies. Extract used in tea in India, China, Japan, Europe, Africa, etc.

Take Black Nightshade only under medical supervision. Some varieties contain solanine, steroids; deaths have been reported from use. In India, some varieties are eaten as vegetables, but similar varieties may be violently toxic. There is a deadly nightshade; be sure not to confuse them. Even so, use moderately. [Medicinal Herb Info]

Take my advice please and don't.

Written September 13, 2021