

39. *ARBUTUS UNEDO* L. (ERICACEAE) — Strawberry Tree, Arbutus

Beautiful evergreen shrub, whose “narcotic” fruit was once an item of diet. The young shoots were once recommended as winter fodder for goats, the rather insipid fruits eaten by blackbirds and thrushes. The wood makes good charcoal, and the bark is used for tannin. “In Spain, a sugar and spirit have been extracted from the fruit and a wine made from it in Corsica.”² The mealy fruits are also used to make marmalades.¹ The strawberry tree is used in folk remedies for excrescences.⁴ Reported to be antiseptic, astringent, intoxicant, narcotic, and tonic,³² arbutus has proven useful in urinary infections.

Leaves contain ca. 2.7% arbutin, methylarbutin, hydroquinone, 0.2% unedoside ($C_{14}H_{20}O_9$) arbutoflavonol A ($C_{22}H_{16}O_{10}$), arbutoflavonol B ($C_{23}H_{18}O_{13}$), tannin, lupeol, myricetin, leucodelphinidin, glycolic-, ellagic-, ursolic- and gallic-acids; nonacosanol-(15), triacontanol-(1), dotriacontanol-(1), lycopine, cryptoxanthine, violaxanthine. Bark contains up to 45% tannin.³³

Toxicity — Narcotic.²