

# Common Dewberry

## *Rubus flagellaris*

▫ *Rubus flagellaris* is distinguished from other trailing species of *Rubus* by its few-flowered inflorescences, glabrous to sparsely pubescent leaves, and stout-based recurved prickles.

**Family:** Rosaceae **Genus:** *Rubus* **Species:** *flagellaris*  
**Average Height:** Upright stems can potentially reach 4', however, plant growth is mostly horizontal, with trailing stems reaching up to 15' in length. **Bloom Time:** May-June  
**Elevation Range:** All elevations of the Piedmont.  
**Geologic/Soil Associations:** Generalist. Tolerates a wide range of soil conditions. **Soil Drainage Class and Moisture Regime:** Somewhat poorly drained to well-drained; xeric to mesic.  
**Aspect:** East, south, and west. Full sun is preferred and promotes fruiting.

**Habitat Associations:** Ubiquitous in barrens, mesic-to-dry prairies, savannas, woodlands, dry forests, old fields, and roadbanks. Common throughout Virginia.

**Flora Associations:** Natural and prescribed fires remove tall woody vegetation and tend to benefit common dewberry. Indeed, many other species that share the same plant community are fire assisted, responding well to the increased light availability and the removal of accumulated plant debris. Burning also generally lowers soil acidity, making native nitrogen-fixing legumes, such as *Chamaecrista nictitans* (wild sensitive plant) and *Desmodium paniculatum* (narrow-leaf tick-trefoil), more abundant as companions.

**Fauna Associations:** The flowers support a large number of native bees, including cuckoo bees in the genus *Sphcodes*, who are only after a sweet sip of nectar. They lack pollen collecting structures and do not construct their own nests, having evolved to sneak their eggs into the well provisioned nests of other bee species. Butterflies, skippers, and flies also sip dewberry nectar. Insects that feed on other parts of common dewberry include the blackberry aphid (*Aphis rubifolii*), and the red-necked cane borer (*Agrilus ruficollis*), whose larvae produce galls on stems. The caterpillars of many moths feed on dewberry leaves. Dewberries are an important source of summer food to many upland bird species such as the ground-nesting eastern towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) and the brown thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*). Raccoon, eastern chipmunk, white-footed mouse, and other mammals also eat the fruits, while the eastern cottontail and white-tailed deer will browse leaves and stems.

**Notes:** The genus name *Rubus* is the Latin name for bramble, and the species name *flagellaris* means 'whip-like' and refers to the long and supple new shoots. The fruit is eaten raw or cooked into pies, preserves or cobblers. Young shoots can be peeled and eaten raw and the dried leaves make a fine herbal tea.

Eastern bumble bee  
(*Bombus impatiens*) x 2

Eastern tailed-blue  
(*Cupido comyntas*) x 2

Eastern chipmunk  
(*Tamias striatus*) x 1/2

Blackberry looper  
(*Chlorochlamys chloroleucaria*) x 2

Red-necked cane borer  
(*Agrilus ruficollis*) x 2

▫ Common dewberry is a creeping liana (a woody plant with a vine-like growth form)

▫ Typically, "dewberries" produce fruits in the late spring, and other blackberry species fruit in mid-summer.

