

## What is a plant badge?

Short answer: A symbolic method of distinguishing clansmen, cheaper than a metal cap badge.

Plant badges were customarily worn on the Highland bonnet, held by the crest badge, a cockade, or both. In the case of the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan, a sprig of juniper, *Craobh aiteann*, or in the case of the MacLeods of Lewis and Raasay, red whortleberry, *Lus nam Braoileag*, is appropriate to place behind the badge on one's bonnet—or use in arrangements for clan functions or as a design element in clan literature or personal stationery.



**Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)**  
**Plant badge of the MacLeods of Harris**

Juniper is a woody shrub growing throughout temperate northern regions in Europe, Asia and North America. Its small, berry-like cones that have a bitter taste and have been used for medicinal purposes and (sparingly) as a kitchen herb. A more familiar use is as the primary flavoring agent for gin<sup>1</sup>.



**Red**  
***Vaccinium vitis-idaea***  
**Plant badge of the MacLeods of Lewis**

Red Whortleberry, like juniper, is an evergreen, so sprigs can be plucked year-round for use as a plant badge. It is also known as lingonberry, cowberry (UK), foxberry, quailberry, mountain cranberry, lowbush cranberry, mountain bilberry, partridgeberry (in Newfoundland and Cape Breton), and redberry (in Labrador). It grows throughout northern temperate and sub arctic regions in Europe, Asia and North America. The tart red berries it bears are commonly made into jam (visit any IKEA store) and also used to add flavor and vitamins to dishes throughout northern Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Fir Clubmoss, (*Lycopodium selago*) and mountain avens (*Dryas octopetala*) have been suggested as plant badges of the MacLeods in other lists. John Sobieski Stuart, in the *Vestiarium Scoticum* (1845) lists *lus-an-t-sealgair*, or hunter's plant, although he may have been referring to *lus-an-t-seileach*, the sallow or willow<sup>3</sup>. Like tartan, the association of specific plant badges to clans is tied up in Victorian myth. *Vestiarium Scoticum* is universally accepted as a forgery today, but many of the badges and tartans it describes are nevertheless standards in any modern listing (to include the yellow MacLeod tartan).

<sup>1</sup> *Juniperus communis*, Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juniperus\\_communis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juniperus_communis)

<sup>2</sup> *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaccinium\\_vitis-idaea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaccinium_vitis-idaea)

<sup>3</sup> Donald Armstrong Ross, "The Badge of the MacLeods," *The Clan MacLeod Magazine*, Vol 5 No 28, 1963. pp.16-18.