'Compass Harbor' Black Crowberry

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Crowberries (*Empetrum* L., Empetraceae Gray) are low-growing, heath-like evergreens suited as groundcovers in acid soils in exposed situations (Huxley, 1992). Black crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum* L.) is an evergreen, procumbent shrub growing to ≈25 cm high, with individual plants reaching up to 1.2 m wide (Rehder, 1940). The species is grown primarily for its foliage and form effect, as the flowers and fruit offer limited ornamental appeal. *Empetrum nigrum* is native throughout much of northern Europe; northern Asia; and northern North America, south to New York, Michigan, and northern California (Rehder, 1940). It is typically found growing in full sun to partial shade in well-drained, acid soils. *Empetrum nigrum* 'Compass Harbor' was selected for deeper green summer foliage and more compact branching than is typical for the species.

Origin

In 1990, several populations of *E. nigrum* were inspected along the Maine coast in an effort to select individuals with superior landscape characteristics. One individual plant discovered in Hancock County was judged to have superior foliage color and a more compact growth habit compared to other plants observed. Cuttings of the selected plant were rooted and in 1992, five specimens were planted at the Univ. of Maine's Lyle E. Littlefield Ornamentals Trial Garden in Orono. After 10 years of growth, the plants have retained the deep green foliage and dense branching shown by the original plant. The name 'Compass Harbor' was selected to indicate the location of the original plant.

Description

Plant density in 'Compass Harbor' appears to derive from a shorter growth interval between branches. In the original plant of 'Compass Harbor' this interval averaged 8.4 cm, whereas five other plants in the vicinity of the original plant had an average branch spacing of between 10.2 and 12.0 cm. This selection has leaves with darker green leaves [131A; Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), 1995] than typical for the species (135A; RHS, 1995). Winter foliage is mahogany (187A; RHS, 1995). While direct comparisons were not made, 'Compass Harbor' appears to grow at a rate similar to the species. Six-year-old plants in the landscape measured ≈25 cm tall and 80 cm wide. Herbarium specimens of 'Compass Harbor' have been deposited in the herbarium at Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest in Clermont, Ky.

Empetrum nigrum is an evergreen, procumbent shrub with linear to linear-oblong marginally glandular leaves to 4–6 mm. Flowers are axillary, 3–5 mm in diameter, and bear three purple petaloid sepals, three stamens, and a 1–2 mm style. Fruit is a 5–6 mm diameter, black, berry-like drupe with 7–9 nutlets (Re-

hder, 1940). *Empetrum nigrum* lacks the white tomentose leaf margins found on *E. eamesii* (Fern. & Weigand).

Culture and Use

'Compass Harbor' is best propagated by stem cuttings. January stem cuttings (6–8 cm long) treated with 0, 1000, and 3000 ppm K-IBA and stuck in 1 peat : 3 perlite (by volume), under clear plastic domes, rooted 90%, 98%, and 93%, respectively. In the landscape, 'Compass Harbor' crowberry is best grown in full sun to filtered shade in soils with good drainage. It is best used as a limited-spread groundcover or as a rock garden plant in USDA cold-hardiness zones 6 and north (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1990).

Availability

'Compass Harbor' has been distributed to a number of nurseries and botanic gardens across the United States. It is not a patented plant and may be propagated and marketed without royalty restriction. Contact the author for information on propagation material.

Literature Cited

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Fig. 1. *Empetrum nigrum* 'Compass Harbor'.

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