

Thymelaeaceae mezereum family



A worldwide family, it numbers about 500 species; in NS consisting of two shrubs. One is an Acadian introduction; the other is a rare native shrub. All are highly toxic and most are woody, shrubs or trees. Ours have alternate, entire leaves. The flowers are perfect or unisexual, usually regular and 4–5-merous. Petals are absent or insignificant in size; the sepals are petaloid. Ovary is superior, with one developed carpel and one vestigial. The fruit is indehiscent.

Key to genera

Sepals well-developed, petaloid; stamens and style not exerted.

Daphne

Sepals scarcely developed; stamens and style exerted.

Dirca

***Daphne* L.**

Daphne

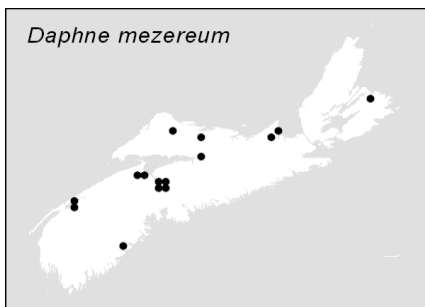
There are about 70 species of these Eurasian shrubs, with a single one introduced to Nova Scotia by French settlers. It is conspicuous, as the pleasing pink to white flowers are clustered about the stems in sessile lateral inflorescences. Perfect, their hypanthia are tubular and unstricted. Petals are absent, but the four sepals are petaloid. Style is very short; the fruit formed is a red or yellow drupe.

***Daphne mezereum* L.**

Daphne; bois joli



Photo by Beth Cameron



A low shrub, our species has light-coloured bark. Alternate leaves are entire and obovate. The rose-coloured flowers are sessile, appearing before the leaves.

Flowers in late April and May.

Thickets, trailsides and at old quarry sites; roadsides.

Frequently encountered near old Acadian home sites. Scattered from Queens County to Cape Breton.

Ranges from NF to ON, south to OH and NY; MT; AK; introduced from Europe, probably by the French.

Formerly found only around Acadian settlements, now thought to be spread by birds.

CAUTION: A few fruit are enough to kill a child. All parts of the plant are TOXIC.

***Dirca* L.**
leatherwood

Of two North American species, a single one reaches Nova Scotia. Both have perfect yellow flowers borne in lateral clusters of 2–4, subtended by pubescent bud scales in early spring. Hypanthia are constricted, forming narrow tubes with spreading lobes. Petals are absent; sepals are minute, quickly deciduous.

***Dirca palustris* L.**
Leatherwood; dirca des marais



Photo by Beth Cameron

A shrub, it bears alternate ovate or obovate leaves, glaucous beneath. They are acute at the apices. The tubular hypanthium is yellow; the stamens are exserted.

Flowers near mid-May, before the leaves expand.

Associated with calcareous soils in deciduous or mixed forest, streamsides.

Limited to Hants County.

Elsewhere much more widespread, from NS to ON, south to OK and FL.

STATUS: Maybe of conservation concern due to rarity.



Photo by Martin Thomas



