

# Invasive plants may threaten Alaska's native berries

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Katie Villano Spellman | UAF graduate student

Christa Mulder, associate professor of ecology, Institute of Arctic Biology and Department of Biology and Wildlife, University of Alaska Fairbanks, measures and records the growth and fruit production of blueberry and cranberry plants in a boreal forest near Fairbanks, Alaska, as part of her research project "Are Alaskan Pollinators Abandoning Native Berries for Exotic Clover?"

flowers that pollen adheres to — under a microscope and see if they can figure out whether the plant was near an invasive plant or not.

To lure prospective citizen scientists to her project, Mulder had a "Taste of Alaska" activity at the booth where people could compare Alaska and commercial blueberries and report which tastes sweeter or more intense, and which they like better.

For details on becoming a citizen scientist visit Mulder's project website at [sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/melibee-project/](http://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/melibee-project/) or contact Katie Spellman at [kvillano@alaska.edu](mailto:kvillano@alaska.edu) or Christa Mulder at [cpmulder@alaska.edu](mailto:cpmulder@alaska.edu).

Climate warming is allowing invasive plants to take hold in Alaska and possibly luring pollinators away from native berries, says University of Alaska Fairbanks ecologist Christa Mulder.

Blueberries and cranberries are a major part of Alaskan's subsistence lifestyle, both directly, by providing berries for eating, and indirectly, by providing forage for animals that people eat. But Alaska's native berries share similar habitats and pollinators with invasive plants such as sweet clover.

"If bees and other pollinators abandon native berries for invasive plants like sweet clover, we could see a lot fewer fruits on these plants," said Mulder, a scientist at the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology who leads a project studying whether the presence of sweet clover can alter the production of bog blueberries and mountain cranberries.

Mulder hopes the public's taste for berries will entice them into becoming volunteer citizen scientists and help her research team gather data on invasive sweet clover in Alaska and northern North America. She recruited scientific helpers at the 2012 USA Science and Engineering Festival in Washington, D.C. April 27-28, as part of an "All Things Bugs" booth.

"You don't need to be a professional scientist to do research," said Mulder. "Whether you live in Alaska or the Lower 48, you can make and record observations and be a part of our research team."

Mulder's booth included a pollinator detective activity where people can look at slides of squashed stigmas — the sticky part of

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