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Biodiversity in the Boreal Forest: Shrubs, Mosses and Lichens

Numerous species of shrubs, including willow, alder, and mountain ash, have also adapted to the conditions in the boreal forest. Other common species include herbs, mosses, fungi, and lichens. Sphagnum moss forms a thick, spongy blanket over saturated soils and can hold up to 4000% of its dry weight in water (Lakehead University 2007). Some shrubs found in the forest, such as blueberry and cranberry, produce brightly coloured berries that attract fruit-eating birds such as bohemian waxwings. The berries also provide food for mammals varying in size from small rodents to large bears. The berries are also an important source of medicine, food and craft resources to the aboriginal groups living in the boreal forests.

Because the soils of the boreal forest are acidic, they are not favorable to nitrifying bacteria. Some plants have adapted ways of acquiring nutrients (particularly nitrogen) from animal protein (Raven *et al.* 1999). These carnivorous plants, such as the *Sarracenia* pitcher plant, have evolved mechanisms to lure their prey into a pool of digestive enzymes. Once trapped in the liquid, the insect is broken down by these enzymes and the nutrients are taken up by the plant.



Blueberries.
Source: Jane Elser
(click to enlarge)

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Carnivorous *Sarracenia* pitcher plant
Source: Jane Elser
(click to enlarge)

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