

Cornelian Cherry – *Cornus mas*

The Cornelian cherry is an inconspicuous bush, which can often be encountered in the National Park Thayatal. However, in the early spring, before the leaves appear it becomes quite stunning. Its bright yellow blossoms shine everywhere, in particular near the “Überstieg” at the meander mountain. In this early time of the year, it constitutes the first source of food for bumble bees and wild bees, whereas in autumn the ripened dark red fruit is eaten by various birds as well as beech martens and dormice, and the stone within gets thus disseminated widely.

Its name of Cornelian cherry already points at the cherry-like fruit, although the bush is not related to cherries, but rather to the cornel plants, which are disseminated throughout Europe in more than 45 varieties. Nevertheless, they are eatable. The tart fruits contain a high level of vitamin C, and can be stewed or turned into jam and liqueur.

Our ancestors already appreciated this wild fruit as Cornelian cherry stones were found in old prehistoric clay pots. And a Cornelian cherry was also discovered among the belongings of the iceman “Ötzi”, which actually helped to identify “Ötzi” as coming from South Tyrol! Not only the fruits, but also the heavy and hardwearing wood of the Cornelian cherry was often utilized. Greeks and Romans used it to make javelins and lances; up to the 20th century, it was used to produce spokes, handles and canes.