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# ***Viburnum tinus* Fruits Use Lipids to produce Metallic Blue Structural Colour**

Rox Middleton<sup>†1,8</sup>, Miranda Sinnott-Armstrong<sup>†2,9</sup>, Yu Ogawa<sup>3</sup>, Gianni Jacucci<sup>1</sup>, Edwige Moyroud<sup>4,5</sup>, Paula J. Rudall<sup>6</sup>, Chrissie Prychid<sup>6</sup>, Maria Conejero<sup>6</sup>, Beverley J. Glover<sup>7</sup>, Michael J. Donoghue<sup>2</sup>, Silvia Vignolini<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Shared co-first authorship

<sup>1</sup> Chemistry Department, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1EW, UK

<sup>2</sup> Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Yale University, PO Box 208106, New Haven, CT 06520, USA

<sup>3</sup> Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, Cermav, Grenoble 38000, France

<sup>4</sup> The Sainsbury Laboratory, University of Cambridge, 47 Bateman Street, Cambridge CB2 1LR, UK

<sup>5</sup> Department of genetics, University of Cambridge, 20 Downing Pl, Cambridge CB2 3EJ, UK

<sup>6</sup> Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB, UK

<sup>7</sup> Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EA, UK

<sup>8</sup> Current Address: Department of Biological Sciences, University of Bristol, 24 Tyndall Ave, Bristol, BS81TQ, UK

<sup>9</sup> Current Address: Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Colorado–Boulder, 80309 USA

\*Lead contact: sv319@cam.ac.uk

## **Summary**

*Viburnum tinus* is an evergreen shrub that is native to the Mediterranean region but cultivated widely in Europe and around the world. It produces ripe metallic blue fruits throughout winter [1]. Despite its limited fleshy pulp,[2] its high lipid content[3] makes it a valuable resource to the small birds[4] that act as its seed-dispersers[5]. Here, we find that the metallic blue appearance of the fruits is produced by globular lipid inclusions arranged in a disordered multilayer structure. This structure is embedded in the cell walls of the epicarp and underlaid with a dark layer of anthocyanin pigments. The presence of such large, organised lipid aggregates in plant cell walls represents a new mechanism for structural colouration and may serve as an honest signal of nutritional content.

## **Results and Discussion**

The colours of fleshy fruits are thought to serve primarily to attract animal dispersers, and understanding the origins and diversity of fleshy fruit colours provides insight into the ecological interactions between plants and their dispersers.[7] *Viburnum tinus* (Adoxaceae) is a shrub native to the Mediterranean region that is now cultivated around the world.[8] It produces large numbers of metallic blue fruits throughout the year. Although a variety of bird dispersers consume *V. tinus* fruits,[2] these serve as an especially important food source for birds during winter, including the Eurasian blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)[9] and the European robin (*Erithacus rubecola*).[10] While the remarkable blue metallic appearance of *V. tinus* fruits (Figure 1) is commonly known and previously reported,[11] the mechanism by which such blue colour is produced has not been elucidated. In a review of earlier literature,[12] the colour of *V. tinus* has been attributed to the presence of anthocyanin pigments.

The fruits of *V. tinus* (Figure 1c) reflect light directionally (producing its metallic appearance) in the blue and UV spectral region (Figure S1). The polarisation of the reflected light is mostly retained (Figure S2a-c&e), a property which indicates that the colouration is structural, rather than pigment-based, originating in reflection from the highly structured cell wall of the outer epicarp (Figure 2a). Dissection of this tissue releases a dark red anthocyanin pigment.[12] Light that is not reflected by the photonic structure is absorbed by the dark red pigment underneath (Figure 2A, Figure 3C & Figure S3E) This absorption prevents backscattering of light, increasing the prominence of the blue reflection from the outer cell wall and therefore enhancing the visually blue appearance (Figure S3).

45 Thus the colour of *V. tinus* fruits results from a combination of a physical nanostructure that  
46 selectively reflects blue wavelengths of light and a base layer of pigments that enhance the blue  
47 colour.

## 48 A globular multilayer nanostructure composes the majority of the outer cell 49 wall

50 To characterize the nanostructures generating blue colour in *V. tinus* fruits, we used multiple  
51 electron microscopy techniques. Scanning electron microscopy of fresh tissue (Figure 2A) clearly  
52 shows the presence of a thick (10-30+  $\mu\text{m}$ ), multilayered structure, parallel to the surface of the fruit  
53 and embedded in the cell wall of the outermost epicarpal cells. A waxy cuticle ( $\sim 2\text{-}6\ \mu\text{m}$ ) on top of  
54 the layered structure covers the fruit surface. The layered architecture occupies most of the outer  
55 cell wall in the region between the cuticle and the cellulose-rich primary cell wall. The layers range in  
56 thickness between 30-200nm (Figure 2) and extend across the whole cell. Transmission electron  
57 microscopy (Figure 2) reveals that this architecture consists of many layers of small vesicles that  
58 differ in electron scattering power and refractive index from the matrix. Imaging by SEM and TEM  
59 (Figures 2, 3 & S4) indicates that the matrix appears to contain key components of typical plant cell  
60 walls, namely cellulose and hemicelluloses. Staining with ruthenium red (Figures 3D & S4A) shows a  
61 significant pectin content, and electron diffraction demonstrates the presence of cellulose by  
62 characteristic diffraction rings of the native cellulose crystal (Figure S4). Although the refractive  
63 index contrast layers are discrete and remain distinct from one another, considerable disorder is  
64 introduced by non-parallel neighbouring layers and the irregularity of their globular structure. Serial  
65 tomography (Figure 2E) of the epidermal cell wall reveals that these globular vesicles are organised  
66 in merged layers through which the cellulosic cell wall matrix remains connected by bridges and  
67 strings (Figure 2B; a 3D rotation model of this structure is available in the supplemental material  
68 Video S1).

## 69 Evidence for the presence of lipids in the globular contrast phase

70 We demonstrated that the globular multilayer structure in the *V. tinus* fruit epidermis is composed  
71 of lipids embedded in a cell wall matrix using a variety of methods. As solvency in nonpolar organic  
72 solvents is a well-defined hallmark of lipids, we imaged unfixed cryo ultrathin sections of the fruit  
73 epidermis before and after exposure to chloroform.[13] TEM images from the same sample region  
74 before (Figure 3A) and after (Figure 3B) chloroform exposure show that the globular structure has  
75 been removed by the treatment. In the latter image, the contrast of the globular multilayer phase is  
76 reduced and the empty structures within the matrix remain visible. In comparison, exposure to  
77 water did not alter the ultrastructure or image contrast of the globular multilayer, indicating that the  
78 material is extractable only with non-polar solvents. Secondly, when imidazole buffered osmium  
79 tetroxide, which binds to lipids, [14][15] was used during the chemical fixation process, the globular  
80 layers were preferentially stained (Figure 2) confirming their lipidic nature. In contrast, when  
81 ruthenium red was used (which binds to pectin[16]) the cell wall matrix was preferentially stained  
82 while the globular structure was washed away in the absence of imidazole buffer (Figure 3D).  
83 Additionally, a thin section of the epicarp was stained with Sudan Black B[17] which visibly stains  
84 lipids observed in the thickened cell wall in Figure S2D.

85 For all of the staining methods, we observed dark outlines around the globules (Figure 3E, Figure  
86 S4A). This could indicate the presence of a lipid membrane, which might be required at the interface  
87 between hydrophobic molecules and the hydrophilic polysaccharides of the secondary cell wall.[18]

88 Lipids comprise a diversity of molecular structures, generally classified as waxes, fats and oils,  
89 depending on their melting points.[19] Waxes are regularly found on the surface of the plant  
90 epidermis, making up the water-resistant waxy cuticle. Although waxes also include a diversity of  
91 molecular structures,[20] at least one prevalent component, alkanes,[21] are sufficiently indigestible  
92 to be a useful diet indicator in faecal samples.[22] In contrast, oils and fats are a vital nutritional  
93 resource as they contain much more energy per volume than is stored in starch or proteins.[15] Fats  
94 are generally found in large oil bodies inside cells of storage organs like seeds. In the case of *V. tinus*  
95 fruits, the close proximity of the globular structure to both the large energy-rich seed and the waxy  
96 external cuticle[23] makes the distinction between waxes and fats a particularly important one for  
97 understanding both the functional significance and developmental origins of the structure. In order  
98 to further identify whether the lipid globules are indigestible waxes or nutritious fats and oils, we  
99 used a variety of light-microscopy stains. Fixed sections were incubated with Nile Blue A,[24] which  
100 stains the globule-rich region of the cell wall in *V. tinus* a blue or blue/purple-colour (Figure 3C). This  
101 indicates that the globules are more likely to be free fatty acids than cutin polymer, which would  
102 stain pink or red.[24]

103 Additionally, an electron diffraction diagram of the globular multilayer structure (Figure S4C-D)  
104 shows a sharp ring pattern, differing from the diagram of a cellulose cell wall with the characteristic  
105 two rings of cellulose crystals (Figure S4D). This pattern indicates that the lipid bodies are likely  
106 crystalline and therefore are homogenous monomeric lipids rather than polymerised molecules such  
107 as cutin, the waxy cuticle component, making them likely to be digestible. This raises the question of  
108 whether the lipids are derived from the cuticularisation process, arrested before polymerisation,[25]  
109 or derived from the internal nutritional lipids. Further extraction and characterisation would be  
110 required to ascertain the chemical composition and the developmental and evolutionary origins of  
111 these lipid bodies.

112 The biphasic organisation of the cell wall maintains hydrophilic channels spanning the globular lipid  
113 structure. Given the high nutritionally relevant lipid content of the fruit,[3] and the very thin layer of  
114 flesh that composes the mesocarp, the proportion of lipid stored in the epicarp could be substantial,  
115 but this remains to be determined.

116

## 117 Models of the optical reflectance from lipid globular multilayer

118 In order to confirm that the observed mixed structure composed of a cellulosic matrix and layered  
119 lipid globules is responsible for the blue reflectance of *V. tinus* fruits, we modelled its optical  
120 response. To do this we investigated two mathematical models – (i) a 2D array of spheres, and (ii)  
121 averaging over many 1D biphasic multilayers. Disorder was introduced into the models and  
122 compared to experimental data.

123 An inverse design algorithm was used to model the structure in 2D as a series of globular  
124 accumulations; in Figure 4A-C each of the schematics corresponds to the adjacent modelled  
125 reflected spectrum.[26] This algorithm allows us to independently introduce different types of  
126 disorder into the globular multilayer by tailoring the size and structure factor, i.e. the Fourier  
127 transform of the positions of the particles. We studied the optical response of layered lipid globules  
128 with different amounts of variation in globule diameter (Figure 4A), disorder in the angle between  
129 adjacent globules (parameter  $S_p$ , Figure 4B, no disorder produces a flat plane), and disorder in the  
130 average distance between adjacent globules (parameter  $S_k$ , Figure 4C). The introduction of different  
131 types of disorder (Figure 4A-C) always produced the same effect on the optical response of the  
132 globular multilayer, namely reducing the peak intensity.

133 Therefore, rather than dealing with each disorder element individually, the structure and material  
134 composition of the *V. tinus* cell wall was approximated as disordered 1D multilayers with refractive  
135 indices corresponding to cellulose ( $n = 1.55$ ) [27] and a typical plant lipid ( $n = 1.47$ ). [28] The model  
136 includes water immersion conditions, and the existence of a dark anthocyanin absorptive pigment  
137 underneath. The anthocyanin absorption spectrum used here is the cyanidin-3-glucoside extracted  
138 from bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), [29] which is one of the primary anthocyanins previously  
139 identified in *V. tinus* (the other being cyanidin 3-(200-xylosylglucoside)-5-glucoside). [12]

140 The statistical distribution of layer characteristics was measured from TEM cross-sections for  
141 initialisation in the multilayer model. The distributions of thicknesses of both materials are shown in  
142 Figure 4D. However, the effective model used a lower degree of disorder in layer thickness (s.d.  
143 =25nm rather than measured s.d. = 45nm) which is attributed to a small sample size, TEM  
144 artefacts [30] and long range order. The modelled reflectance using the averages over 1D multilayers  
145 is shown in Figure 4E.

146 Introducing disorder, as observed in cross-section measurements, into the model of a coherent  
147 ordered reflector broadens its reflectance band, in agreement with previous studies. [31] The  
148 broadband, asymmetric peak and angle-independence improves the fit of the resulting model to the  
149 real reflectance measured from *V. tinus* fruits, indicating that the model represents a good  
150 approximation to the *V. tinus* measurements. Due to its simplicity, the model is not meant to  
151 perfectly replicate the experimental measurements, but rather to indicate the validity of the  
152 disordered multilayer producing the optical response measured in *V. tinus*. The disorder in the  
153 multilayer in the form of boundaries of the globular multilayer that are non-perpendicular to the  
154 optical axis is consistent with the visibility of diffuse, wide-angle blue scattering observed in cross-  
155 section, as imaged in Figure S2E.

## 156 Implications of lipid-based structural colour for the honest signalling of 157 nutrition

158 The colouration of *V. tinus* fruits is very striking to the human visual system. Comparison with blue tit  
159 spectral sensitivity (reproduced in Figure 1D [6]) shows that it falls well within the visually relevant  
160 range for relevant birds. The visual background for the fruit is predominantly the green leaves of *V.*  
161 *tinus*, the dominant pigment of which is chlorophyll. Chlorophyll has a broad spectral signature, with  
162 a peak at 550nm, and negligible reflectance below 500nm, making the colour of *V. tinus* fruits  
163 chromatically contrasted against foliage, as shown in Figure S3D. Birds are strongly responsive to  
164 visual stimuli, [32] and a predominant function of fruit colouration is to attract animals that carry out  
165 seed dispersal. [33][34] Thus, the lipid-based structural colour of *V. tinus* fruits could act as a visual  
166 signal for foraging birds.

167 Since birds likely use fruit colour to help them determine which fruits to consume, the colours of  
168 fruits may function as an honest signal of their nutritional reward. Honest signalling in fruits has  
169 been described, but the results are inconsistent. In some species in the Atlantic forest of Brazil, dark  
170 colouration corresponds with a carbohydrate-rich nutritional reward [35] whereas in other species in  
171 the Mediterranean, dark colouration has been associated with a lipid-rich nutritional reward. [36]  
172 The correlation between anthocyanin content and dark colour is thought to derive from shared  
173 biochemical pathways between anthocyanin and sugar synthesis. [35] Greater anthocyanin content  
174 typically makes fruits darker [37] although we know of no such biochemical explanation for the  
175 correlation between dark colouration and lipid content.

176 We posit that blue fruit colour in *V. tinus* could serve as an honest signal of nutritional lipid content  
177 owing to fact that in this system lipids both create the colour and provide nutrition The lipids in the  
178 photonic structure are probably short-chain fatty acids, which are digestible by birds and thus  
179 contribute in part to the overall nutritional content. We did not determine what proportion of the  
180 high lipid nutritional reward in *V. tinus* fruits[3] is due to lipids in the photonic structure rather than  
181 lipids occurring elsewhere in the mesocarp.

182 Honest signalling systems are often thought to be expensive due to the cost of producing the signal.  
183 [36][38]. In this case, however, the interests of the signaller and the receiver are aligned: chromatic  
184 contrast enhances visibility for birds and signals a more valuable nutritional content to the bird, both  
185 features that are likely to increase dispersal. Although there is a cost associated with producing a  
186 blue photonic structure (the energy invested in making the lipids), that cost also provides direct  
187 benefits in the form of better advertising and better nutritional reward.

188  
189 A disordered lipid multilayer as we report here in *V. tinus* has not been described previously in a  
190 biomaterial. However, the nanostructure in *V. tinus* may help us understand colouration in two  
191 other species with structurally coloured fruits (*Elaeocarpus angustifolius*[39] and *Delarbrea*  
192 *michieana*[40]), which show strong morphological parallels. For instance, *D. michieana* is described  
193 as having an iridosome, composed of “bubble-like” structures, that visually appears similar to the  
194 architecture we observe in *V. tinus*. [40] Should these other species prove to use a similar structure  
195 to that of *V. tinus*, it would provide an intriguing example of parallel evolution in distantly related  
196 plant lineages.

197

## 198 Conclusions

199 The architecture (a disordered multilayer reflector, generated by a biphasic structure of lipids and  
200 cellulose cell wall) in the epidermal cell walls of *V. tinus* fruits is unlike that of any previously  
201 described structurally coloured fruits, or any other known structurally coloured material. The  
202 coincidence of the striking colouration and high nutritional content of the coloured material itself  
203 suggests that it may be an honest signal of nutritional reward evolved as a result of biotic selection.

204

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215

## 216 Author Contributions

217 Conceptualisation, R. M., M.S.A., E.M., B.J.G., S.V.; Investigation: Optical Characterisation, R.M.;  
218 Electron Microscopy, M.S.A., Y.O., P.J.R., C.P., M.C. ; Numerical Modelling, R.M., G.J.; Composition  
219 Analysis, M.S.A., Y.O.; Formal Analysis, R.M., M.S.A.; Resources, R.M., M.S.A., E.M.; Writing – Original

220 Draft, R.M.; Writing – Review & Editing, All Authors; Visualisation, R.M., M.S.A., Y.O., G.J.;  
221 Supervision, B.J.G., M.D., S.V.;  
222

## 223 Declaration of Interests

224 The authors declare no competing interests.  
225

## 226 Figure Legends

227

228 **Figure 1. Optical appearance of ripe *V. tinus* fruits.** (A) A habitat photograph of ripe fruits on *V. tinus*  
229 shrub in natural light displaying a metallic blue appearance. An additional macro-photograph and  
230 UV-isolated image are shown in Figure S1. (B) Microscopic image of the fruit surface in reflected  
231 light, showing the angle-dependence of colour intensity over the curvature of each cell. Additional  
232 polarisation microscopy response and cross-sectional microscopy are shown in Figure S2. (C)  
233 Macroscopic UV-Vis reflectance spectrum taken by a double-ended probe and calibrated to a silver  
234 mirror reference. Additional macroscale spectra comparing fruit and leaf reflectance are included in  
235 Figure S3D. (D) Predicted blue tit (*Parus caeruleus*) spectral sensitivity from cone response, oil  
236 droplets and ocular media, reproduced from [6]. Sensitivities shown as a reference for the visual  
237 relevance of the fruit signal to potential fruit dispersers. The x-axis is identical in both plots. The blue  
238 tit visual system is chosen for phylogenetic relatedness with a principal *V. tinus* frugivore, *Sylvia*  
239 *atricapilla* (Eurasian blackcap).

240 **Figure 2. Electron microscopy and reconstruction of internal 3D architecture** (A) Block-face SEM  
241 showing epidermal cell with internal cavity filled with pigmented contents. Most of the cell wall  
242 constitutes the globular multilayer. Labels: wc – waxy cuticle, gm – globular multilayer region, mc –  
243 monophasic (cellulosic) cell wall, cc – cell content. The dark red pigment is present in the cell content  
244 'cc', and is seen in a light microscope cross-section in Figure S3E. A reduced magnification showing  
245 multiple cells is shown in Figure S4B. (B) TEM of the globular multilayer in the outer cell wall matrix;  
246 the cell outer surface is above the top edge. (C) Higher magnification TEM of globules shown in (B).  
247 (D) 3D reconstruction of globular layers reconstructed from TEM serial tomography using the  
248 isosurface function in iMod. The globular multilayer forms a merged plate-like structure rather than  
249 isolated globules. Full rotation video is shown in Video S1. (E) Reconstruction of globular inclusions  
250 using three joined serial tomograms parallel to the curved fruit surface. The plate-like structure  
251 parallel to the surface is visible, along with the bridges traversing it.

252 **Figure 3. Identification of cell wall multilayer components.** (A-B) A cryo-ultrathin section of the  
253 same portion of the globular multilayer region imaged before (A) and after (B) extraction with  
254 chloroform, showing the removal of the electron-dense internal lipid phase in the globular layers.  
255 Arrows indicate the same location on the sample, which appears inverted due to the loss of stained  
256 lipid. (C) Nile Blue A staining of the fruit epicarp observed with transmitted light microscopy showing  
257 the cellulosic cell walls (dark blue), the outer cuticle (pink) and the mixed layer (purple) in the  
258 multilayer. (D) TEM image after ruthenium red staining indicates that pectin is present in the cell  
259 wall matrix, a higher magnification image is given in Figure S4(A). (E) TEM with lipid staining showing  
260 dark outlines around the globules. ew, epicuticular wax, wc – waxy cuticle, gm – globular multilayer  
261 region, mc – monophasic (cellulosic) cell wall, cc – cell content.

262 **Figure 4 Numerical models of multilayers and disorder.** (A-C), Simulated optical response of 2µm  
263 thick, 2D models with different types of disorder as indicated in schematics (A1, B1, C1). (D) A  
264 histogram presenting data showing the distribution of layer widths for both cellulose and lipid layers,  
265 measured from analysis of TEM cross-section profiles. (E) Numerical model of the lipid-cellulosic

266 structure as a 1D disordered multilayer: 58nm (lipid layer), 67nm (cellulose layer), s.d. = 25nm. The  
267 experimentally measured *V. tinus* spectrum is shown again for comparison.

## 268 **STAR Methods**

269 Lead Contact: Silvia Vignolini sv319@cam.ac.uk

## 270 **Resource Availability**

271 This study did not generate new unique reagents, nor any unique datasets or code.

272

## 273 **Experimental Model and Subject Details**

274 *V. tinus* fruits were imaged with optical and electron microscopes ripening over the course of five  
275 years. We estimate fifteen separate occasions each for optical and electron microscopic analyses,  
276 the majority of which treated several samples from different fruits and individual plants. Samples  
277 were collected from private and college gardens around Cambridge and Bristol. TEM and SEM  
278 measurements were consistent across individuals and measurements. For the histogram in Figure 4D  
279 we used nine different TEM images from multiple sample fruits.

## 280 **Method Details**

### 281 **Optical Techniques**

282 For macro-spectroscopy (Figure 1C), deuterium - halogen tungsten lamp (DH-2000-BAL UV-VIS-NIR,  
283 Ocean Optics) illumination by a double ended fibre (QR400-7-UV-VIS, Ocean Optics) coupled to a  
284 Flame-S-UV-VIS miniature spectrometer was accessed by (Ocean Optics) software, and calibrated to  
285 a white standard (WS-1-SL, Ocean Optics) and a mirror reflectance tile (Avantes RS-2) for total  
286 intensity. The probe aperture was locked into a black aluminium mounting block obscuring stray  
287 light, 1cm from the fruit surface.

288 *In situ* macro-spectroscopy of fruits and leaves (Figure S3D) was performed with an Ocean Optics  
289 USB2000 spectrometer illuminated by deuterium and halogen lamps, standardized with a Spectralon  
290 white reflectance standard (Ocean Optics, Dunedin, FL). Reflectance was measured 3mm from the  
291 surface of the fruit or leaf.

292 For the optical microscopy (Figure 1B, S2-S3) and micro-spectroscopy (S2-S3), a Zeiss A1 microscope  
293 was used in reflection mode for optical measurements with a Zeiss Hal100 halogen lamp and a  
294 water-immersion objective lens (Zeiss W N-Achroplan 10x, 40x and 63x magnification). The image  
295 was captured on a CCD (IDS UI-3580LE-C-HQ) and accessed by uEye Cockpit user interface software.  
296 For polarisation measurements, incident (Zeiss 427710-9000) and reflection (Thorlabs 25 mm wire  
297 grid) polarisers were used for polarisation control. For micro-spectrometry, the reflected light was  
298 coupled via optical fibre (Avantes 50µm internal diameter) to a spectrometer (Avantes AvaSpec-  
299 HS2048) and calibrated to a silver mirror (Thorlabs, PF10-03-P01).

300 The high magnification macroscale image in Figure S1A was taken using built-in LED full-ring  
301 illumination of a VHX-5000 Keyence digital microscope.

302 Photo in Figure 1A was taken with a Sony DSLR-α300 and SAL30M28 macrolens. The UV-only photo  
303 Figure S1B was taken with a Nikon DSLR-D90 camera, 105mm f4.5 UV-Micro-APO lens (Coastal  
304 Optics) and Baader U-Filter 60nmHBW/320-380nm.

## 305 **Electron Microscopy**



306 Cryo-electron microscopy was carried out on fresh fruits sectioned, mounted on carbon glue and  
307 flash frozen by infiltration with liquid ethane at  $-195^{\circ}\text{C}$  and coated with 5 nm platinum using an FEI  
308 Varios 460 microscope with Quorum PP3010T cryo-SEM preparation and transfer system at  
309 Cambridge Advanced Imaging Centre.

310 For TEM, fresh tissue was prepared by immersion in Karnovsky's fixative for 1-14 days, dissected,  
311 and stained with osmium tetroxide for 2 hours. Tissue samples then experienced graduated  
312 infiltration with an ethanol-resin series to fixation in LR White resin and polymerised for 24 hours in  
313 vacuum at  $60^{\circ}\text{C}$ . [41] A Leica UCT microtome and diamond knife was used to cut 70-100 nm sections.  
314 Sections were imaged on a Hitachi H-7650 transmission electron microscope (TEM) and a JEM 2100  
315 Plus (Jeol) equipped with a RIO 16 CMOS camera (Thermo Fisher Scientific).

316 For serial tomography, serial semi-thick (300 nm) sections were cut using a Leica UCT umicrotome  
317 and diamond knife and mounted on a Formvar-coated slot grid. 15nm-diameter colloidal gold  
318 particles were attached to both sides of the grids to serve as fiducial markers in the tomographic  
319 reconstructions. Series of tilted images from  $-60^{\circ}$  to  $60^{\circ}$  angles were recorded every  $1^{\circ}$  using a  
320 TECNAI F30 (FEI) operated at 300kV. Images from three sections were combined into a single, serial  
321 tomogram using the IMOD software package [42] and the lipid surfaces modelled using the IMOD  
322 isosurface function.

### 323 **Staining Histology**

324 Staining of the ultrathin sections of embedded samples was used for identification of structural  
325 composition in light microscopy (Nile Blue A, Sudan Black B) and electron microscopy (imidazole  
326 buffer, ruthenium red). Nile Blue A stains neutral fats and waxes a red or pink colour but fatty acids  
327 blue [24] (Figure 3C). Sudan Black B stains lipids a dark blue or black colour (Figure S2D). [17]; [43]  
328 Stains were applied for 60 minutes at room temperature (Nile Blue A, after washing in acetic acid for  
329 10s and isopropanol for 30s) or  $60^{\circ}\text{C}$  (Sudan Black B). Staining with Oil Red O was attempted but  
330 failed to penetrate the resin.

331 For chloroform extraction, transverse ultrathin sections of epicarp with a thickness of 80-90 nm  
332 were cut at cryogenic temperature ( $-110^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) with a diamond knife on a Leica EM UC7  
333 ultramicrotome and collected on carbon-coated copper grids. Grids with cryo-sections were exposed  
334 to chloroform under reflux for 1 hour. Both untreated and treated sections were then observed  
335 without further post staining using a TEM (JEM 2100Plus, JEOL) equipped with RIO16 CMOS camera  
336 (Gatan Inc.) and operated at 200 kV.

### 337 **Electron Diffraction**

338 Selected area electron diffraction (SAED) experiments were carried out with untreated cryo-sections  
339 and a TEM (JEM 2100 Plus) operated at 200 kV. A selected area aperture with a diameter of 500 nm  
340 was used. The SAED patterns were recorded on the RIO16 camera using the low-dose module of  
341 Serial EM software.

### 342 **Structural Analysis**

343 TEM profiles were analysed using Fiji [44] to extract the dimensional statistics of the two different  
344 refractive index layers. Nine globular multilayer cross-sectional TEM images were binarised and  
345 image intensity profiles measured, from which the width distributions of cellulose and lipid layers  
346 were taken.

### 347 **Numerical modelling**

348 2D structures with different types of disorder were generated using a recently developed inverse  
349 design algorithm discussed in detail in Jacucci et al.[26] Numerical simulations of the optical  
350 response of the generated structures were performed in Lumerical, a software using the finite  
351 difference time domain (FDTD) method. The simulations were performed using periodic boundary  
352 conditions in the direction perpendicular to the incoming beam – set as a plane wave – and perfect  
353 matching layer (PML) boundaries in the thickness direction. The numerical stability/convergence of  
354 the simulations was ensured by choosing an extensive simulated time of 0.1ns and boundary  
355 conditions as stated. This ensured that the electric field in the structure decayed before the end of  
356 the calculation and that all the excitation light was either reflected or transmitted. Each of the  
357 presented curves was obtained averaging the optical simulations of five different ensembles of  
358 particles with identical parameters.

359 The disordered 1D multilayer was built with the `jreftran`[45] function in MATLAB. An average of 100  
360 trials were taken of 1D multilayer stacks of 160 pitch repeats, with lipid and cellulose layers having  
361 widths 58 and 67 nm respectively, with a standard deviation of 25 nm and refractive indices  $n = 1.47$   
362 and 1.55 respectively, taken from literature values as described in the main text. The upper  
363 refractive index boundary was matched to non-absorptive water ( $n=1.33$ ) and the lower to a  
364 complex refractive with light absorption taken from measurements of cyanidin-3-glucoside extracted  
365 from bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).[29] Angle of incidence was  $0^\circ$ .

366

### 367 **Quantification and Additional Analysis**

368

369 No further methods were used to determine whether the data met assumptions, as a statistical  
370 approach was not taken.

371

### 372 **Additional Resources**

373

374 **Video S1: Movie showing 3D rotation of globular multilayer structure model. Related to Figure 2D.**  
375 Video reconstructed from three sets of TEM serial tomography using the isosurface function in iMod.  
376 The single view shown in Figure 2D corresponds to a frame of this reconstruction.

377 This study did not generate any unique datasets or code.

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