

Cohosh, Black

Botanical: *Cimicifuga racemosa* (NUTT.)

Family: N.O. Ranunculaceae

Synonyms

Black Snake Root. Rattle Root. Squaw Root. Bugbane.

Part Used

Root.

Habitat

A native of North America, where it grows freely in shady woods in Canada and the United States. It is called Black Snake Root to distinguish it from the Common Snake Root (*Aristolochia serpentaria*).

Description

The seeds are sent annually to Europe, and should be sown as soon as the season will permit. It flowers in June or early in July, but does not perfect seed in England, though it thrives well in moist shady borders and is perfectly hardy. It is a tall, herbaceous plant, with feathery racemes of white blossoms, 1 to 3 feet long, which being slender, droop gracefully. The fruits are dry.

The plant produces a stout, blackish rhizome (creeping underground stem), cylindrical, hard and knotty, bearing the remains of numerous stout ascending branches. It is collected in the autumn after the fruit is formed and the leaves have died down, then cut into pieces and dried. It has only a faint, disagreeable odour, but a bitter and acrid taste.

The straight, stout, dark brown roots which are given off from the under surface of the rhizome are bluntly quadrangular and furrowed. In the dried drug, they are brittle, broken off usually quite close to the rhizome. In transverse section, they show several wedge-shaped bundles of porous, whitish wood. A similar section of the rhizome shows a large dark-coloured, horny pith, surrounded by a ring of numerous pale wedges of wood, alternately with dark rays, outside which is a thin, dark, horny bark.

Constituents

The chief constituent of *Cimicifuga* root is the amorphous resinous substance known as Cimicifugin, or Macrotin, of which it contains about 18 per cent but the bitter taste is due to a crystalline principle named Racemosin. The drug also contains two resins, together with fat, wax starch, gum, sugar and an astringent substance.

Medicinal Action and Uses

Astringent, emmenagogue, diuretic, alterative, expectorant. The root of this plant is much used in America in many disorders, and is supposed to be an antidote against poison and the bite of the rattlesnake. The fresh root, dug in October, is used to make a tincture.

In small doses, it is useful in children's diarrhoea.

In the paroxysms of consumption, it gives relief by allaying the cough, reducing the rapidity of the pulse and inducing perspiration. In whooping-cough, it proves very effective.

The infusion and decoction have been given with success in rheumatism.

In infantile disorders, it is given in the form of syrup. It is said to be a specific in St. Vitus' Dance of children. Overdoses produce nausea and vomiting.

Preparations

Fluid extract, U.S.P., 15 to 30 drops. Fluid extract, B.P., 5 to 30 drops. Tincture, U.S.P., 1 drachm. Tincture, B.P., 15 to 60 drops. Cimicifugin, 1 to 6 grains. Powdered extract, U.S.P., 4 grains.