

Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga foetida*, *Cimicifuga dahurica*, *Cimicifuga heracleifolia*)  
Common Names: Bugbane, cimicifuga, squawroot, and black snakeroot.

Location: This herb can be found on the Atlantic seaboard and in eastern Canada.

Description: The rhizome and the roots of this herb are used medicinally.

Properties: This herb is used to balance hormone levels in both males and females. Black Cohosh can be used to help aid the process of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS).

Uses: Use black cohosh to sooth a soar throat, improve vision, aid in menopause, help with infertility and regulate hormones.

Doses: Look for black cohosh in capsule form, tinctures, and fluidextracts.

Warnings: Girls who have not reached their first menstruation should not take this herb. Do not take this herb if you are pregnant or nursing, on birth control, taking replacemnt hormones, or if you have heart disease

#### Black Cohosh

**MEDICINAL:** Black Cohosh is useful in all conditions dealing with arthritis. It improves blood circulation, and is used in treating delayed and painful menstruation, and is often used in conjunction with other herbs in treating menopause symptoms. It should not be used during pregnancy. Black Cohosh can be poisonous in large doses. It contains a chemical much like estrogen, so those advised by their doctor's not to take the Pill should avoid using this herb.

**MAGICKAL:** Black Cohosh leaves laid around a room is said to drive away bugs, and to drive away negativity.

**GROWING:** Black Cohosh grows in open woody areas. It needs good soil and partial to mostly shade to do well. It has been grown as far south as Georgia, and as far west as Missouri. It is a perennial which reaches 3 - 8 feet tall.

#### **Black Cohosh Root**

#### **Also known as**

*Cimicifuga racemosa*, *Actaea Macrotyis*, *Actaea Racemosa*, Baneberry, Black Snakeroot, Bugbane, Bugwort, *Cimicifuga Racemosa*, Phytoestrogen, Rattle Root, Rattle Snakeroot, Rattlesnake Root, Rattleweed, Squawroot. Do not confuse with the potentially toxic blue cohosh.

#### **Introduction**

Black cohosh is a graceful woodland plant bearing spikes of white flowers, native to New England and eastern Canada. Native Americans have used the herb to treat snakebite and joint problems, but primarily used the herb for women's health. The name cohosh is from the Algonquian tribe, and means rough, referring to the feel of the rhizome. Settlers adopted the herb for the same purposes, and in the late 1800's it became the key ingredient in Lydia Pinkham's "Vegetable Compound", a wildly popular over the counter medicine for menstrual problems, infertility, and unpleasant symptoms of menopause. Lydia Pinkham's "Vegetable Compound" continued to be sold in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was given the name "bugbane" because the flowers have such a strong odor, and have been used to effectively repel insects. Today, black cohosh remains one of the most popular remedies in the world for women's natural health.

#### **Constituents**

Actein, cimicifugin, formononetin, salicylic acid, tannins, vitamin C.

#### **Parts Used**

Root.

#### **Typical Preparations**

Finely chopped, dried root in tablets, teas, or tinctures.

## Summary

Black cohosh is a popular remedy for hot flashes, mood swings, and vaginal dryness of menopause. The herb does not stimulate the production of estrogen, but it may compensate for low or highly variable levels of estrogen during menstruation or in the menopause. In one well-designed study, 62 women going through menopause received black cohosh, estrogen, or a placebo for 90 days. Women who took black cohosh had the same reduction in hot flashes as women taking estrogen. Black cohosh did not stimulate growth of cells in the uterus, suggesting that, unlike estrogen, the herb does not increase the risk of uterine cancer. Black cohosh also increased the thickness of the vaginal wall. The study also suggested that black cohosh could help prevent osteoporosis.

## Precautions

In menopausal women, black cohosh is not likely to cause any complications other than mild stomach upset. Black cohosh must be avoided during pregnancy because of its potential ability to stimulate uterine contractions. The safety of black cohosh in breastfeeding mothers and the degree of transmission of black cohosh in breast milk has not been established. There is controversy regarding the safety of black cohosh in women with a personal history or strong family history of breast cancer.

## Cohosh, Black

**Botanical:** *Cimicifuga racemosa* (NUTT.)

**Family:** N.O. Ranunculaceae

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---**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*).

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---**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 Macrotoin, 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.

**Using Black Cohosh** to disrupt pregnancy, black cohosh is a helper herb, helping to prepare the cervix to release the contents of the uterus. It is often used during childbirth to help ripen the cervix in preparation for delivery. It is best used combined with [blue cohosh](#) or combines well with [vitamin c](#) & [dong quai](#).