

Blue Cohosh

MEDICINAL: Blue Cohosh is used to regulate the menstrual flow. It is also used for suppressed menstruation. Native Americans used this herb during childbirth to ease the pain and difficulty that accompany birthing, as well as to induce labor. This herb should not be taken during pregnancy, and should be taken in very small amounts in conjunction with other herbs, such as Black Cohosh.

GROWING: Blue Cohosh grows best in deep, loamy, moist woodlands. The berry of this plant is poisonous, and the plant itself can irritate the skin. The root is the part used in herbal medicine. It has a range from southern Canada, as far south as the Carolinas, and as far west as Missouri. This herb is best purchased from the stores, rather than cultivated.

Blue Cohosh Root and Powder Profile

Also known as

Caulophyllum thalictroides, blue ginseng, yellow ginseng, papoose root, squawroot. Not to be confused with black cohosh, an unrelated plant.

Introduction

Blue cohosh is a woodland plant in the same family as barberry, goldenseal, and Oregon grape root, native to the eastern United States and Canada. The word cohosh is from Algonquian and means rough, which refers to the root. The stem is bluish, which is where the rest of the name comes from. It was widely used by midwives both among Native Americans and American settlers in the nineteenth century to induce labor, and to treat menstrual cramps in women and stomach cramps in both sexes. The Iroquois used it to treat arthritis; the Mohegan to treat urinary tract infections, and the Cherokee used it as a tranquilizer. Other Native American uses include a root infusion for lung problems and fever.

Constituents

Alkaloids: scouphoylline (methylcytisine), anagyrine, baptifoline; and magnoflorine. Also contains a unique saponin, caulosaponin, its primary active ingredient.

Parts Used

Dried root.

Typical Preparations

Most frequently used as a tincture. Traditionally combined with goldenseal. May also be used as an extract, capsule or tea.

Summary

Blue cohosh stimulates uterine activity. It can stop menstrual cramping, initiate menstruation when periods are missed, induce labor, or prevent implantation of the fertilized egg into the lining of the uterus during the first 24 hours after intercourse. It is also used to prevent excessive menstrual flow, relieve abdominal cramping, and to treat headache and seizures. As an analgesic, blue cohosh is about 50% more effective than aspirin.

Precautions

Blue Cohosh is a useful herb that should be used with care. If you are pregnant or wishing to use it as a birth control method, it must only be administered by an experienced practitioner. Infants should never be given blue cohosh, or be nursed for 12 hours after their mothers or breastfeeding surrogates have taken blue cohosh. Do not use if there is high blood pressure or heart disease.

Cohosh, Blue

Botanical: *Caulophyllum thalictroides* (MICH.)

Family: N.O. Berberidaceae

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---**Synonyms**---Pappoose Root. Squawroot. Blueberry Root.

---**Part Used**---Root.

---**Habitat**---United States and Canada.

---**Description**---A handsome perennial plant, growing in low rich, moist, soil in swamps and near running streams, smooth and glaucous, and bears in May and June a panicle of small yellowish green flowers and one or two seeds about the size of a large pea, which ripen in August. These are sometimes roasted and boiled in water, and given as a decoction resembling coffee.

The berries are dry and mawkish; the root is a hard thick, irregular, knotty, contorted caudex, one to several inches long, with long slender radicles up to 8 inches long, externally yellowy brown, internally whitish to yellow, with a central pith running longitudinally; taste, sweetish-bitter, then acrid and pungent, with a slightly (pungent) fragrant odour; yields its properties to alcohol, water or glycerine.

---**Constituents**---Gum, starch, salts, extractive, phosphoric acid, soluble resin, greenish-yellow colouring matter, and a body analogous to Saponin.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Emmenagogue, antispasmodic, diuretic, diaphoretic and anthelmintic. Said to be successfully used in rheumatism, dropsy, epilepsy, hysteria and uterine inflammation, specially for chronic cases. It is sometimes combined with *Mitchella repens* and *Eupatoria aromatica*. In use it is preferable to Ergot, expediting delivery, where delay results from debility, fatigue or want of uterine nervous energy.

---**Doses**---Decoction or Infusion. 1 OZ. of root to 1 pint of boiling water, macerated for 1/2 hour. Dose, 2 to 4 fluid ounces three or four times a day.

---**Tincture**---3 oz. of finely powdered root to 1 pint of alcohol, allowed to soak for two weeks, then well shaken and filtered. Dose, 1/2 fluid drachm to 2 fluid drachms. Fluid extract, 10 to 30 drops. Solid extract, 5 to 10 grains. *Caulophyllum*, 2 to 5 grains.

Attempts to terminate Pregnancy

Blue Cohosh contains at least two uterine contracting substances, an oxytocic effect, {oxytocin is a hormone produced during childbirth which causes the uterus to contract} and a substance called Caulosaponin which is a unique substance found only in Blue Cohosh which causes the uterus to contract. It is also an estrogenic herb meaning it contains estrogen-like substances and can have estrogen-like side effects (those with estrogen-dependent tumors should not use this herb). If you are not suppose to use the pill, then you should not use this herb unless under the guidance of your herbalist.

Its abortive qualities are best extracted into an alcohol base, thus a tincture made from the root would be the best form to take.

When attempting to dislodge pregnancy causing the uterus to contract is desirable. Blue Cohosh can be used by itself or combined with other herbs. It is commonly used with [Pennyroyal](#), an herb with abortifacient qualities and/or [Black Cohosh](#), which will help to soften the cervix and relax the os, it also encourages coordinated uterine contractions and according to some sources black cohosh is used to temper the intensity of blue cohosh's contractibility.

Susun notes that the best time to use the herb(s) is before menstruation is due (5 days before is good, before that is a bit premature), and if that opportunity is missed, the next best time, in her opinion, is at 6 weeks pregnant (8 weeks from the last menstrual period), when many spontaneous abortions occur {a spontaneous abortion is what a miscarriage is called if it happens before the 10th week of pregnancy). At 6 weeks pregnant, this is the week that you would have bled if conception had not occurred. At the 8th week of pregnancy, it becomes more dangerous to attempt to end the pregnancy on your own, and herbs to terminate pregnancy should not be used past the 7th week of pregnancy under any circumstances, the risks of having serious problems increases greatly. Herbs should not be used for more than two weeks at a time without a break.

