

Red, white, black, and blue: Differentiating the cohoshes

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A template for study

- ▶ Accurate plant name(s)
- ▶ Humoral/energetic properties
- ▶ Definite clinical actions
- ▶ Tissues affected
- ▶ Uniqueness of the plant
- ▶ Uses
- ▶ Useful pairs and formulas
- ▶ Safety considerations
- ▶ Constituents/scientific trials if relevant.

Humoral/energetic properties

- ▶ Hot or cold, with degree (very hot, hot, warm, slightly warm, neutral, slightly cool, cool, cold, very cold) etc.
- ▶ Dry or moist, with degree as above
- ▶ Tonic/astringent vs Relaxant
- ▶ May add constitutional terminology from other systems

Clinical actions

Reliable and visible clinical effect to be expected

- ▶ Diffusive/Diaphoretic
- ▶ Diuretic
- ▶ Expectorant
- ▶ Antispasmodic
- ▶ Carminative
- ▶ Laxative
- ▶ Sedative
- ▶ Anodyne
- ▶ etc

Tissues affected

- ▶ Connective tissue
- ▶ Skin
- ▶ Mucous membranes
- ▶ Nerves
- ▶ Secreting glands of GI/Liver
- ▶ Smooth muscle
- ▶ Skeletal muscle
- ▶ Capillary circulation
- ▶ Immune
- ▶ Etc

Materia medica differentials

- ▶ First study groups of herbs with similar uses and properties to see their similarity. This is useful for clinical flexibility and substitution
- ▶ Then differential between herbs in the group on the basis of unique property or specific use if relevant.

- ▶ *Actaea (Cimicifuga) racemosa* Black Cohosh
- ▶ *Actaea rubra/pachypoda (alba)* Red/white Cohosh
- ▶ *Actaea spicata* European baneberry
- ▶ *Caulophyllum thalictroides* Blue Cohosh

Actaea /rubra/alba/pachypoda



Actaea rubra (red berries)

- ▶ “For clinical uses, *Actaea racemosa* and *rubra/alba/pachypoda* may be used interchangeably in all regards “(J.U. Lloyd)
- ▶ The berries (doll's eyes) are toxic, leading to the rumor that the entire plant is toxic.
- ▶ No fatalities have ever been recorded from the berries of this species in North America
- ▶ Unlike *Actaea racemosa*, this plant does not grow in abundant stands, is more dispersed, and is generally unavailable in the commercial marketplace.



Actaea rubra white berries



Actaea pachypoda white berries

No difference chemically or therapeutically between red or white-berried **baneberry**.

On rare occasions, both colored berries may be on the same *A. rubra* plant, and *A. pachypoda* may have pink colored berries

Actaea spicata
European Baneberry
Herb Christopher

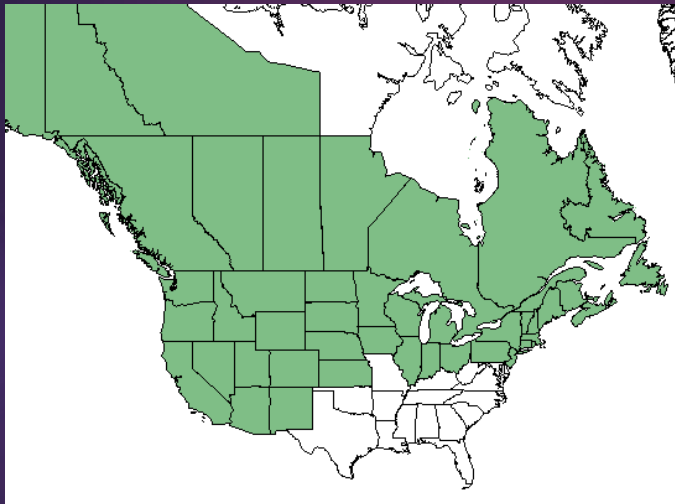


Described in Culpeper and Salmon as poisonous, with topical uses. Berries have reportedly caused death.

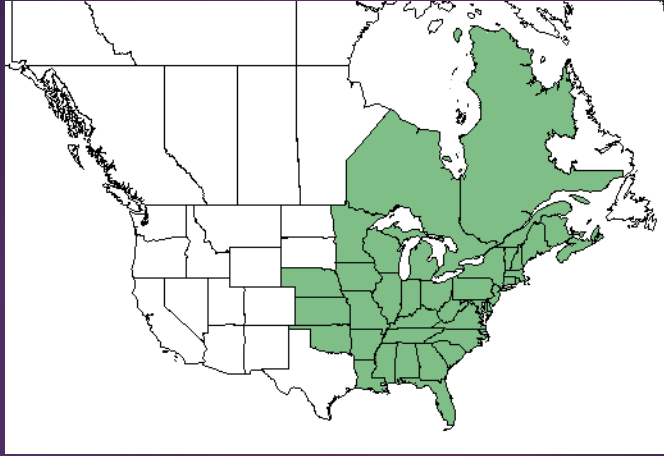
Actaea racemosa
The Black Cohosh



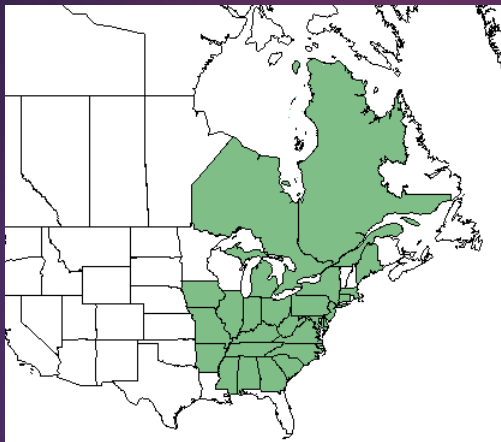
Chief uses of all the North America *Actaea* species learned entirely from Native Americans.



Actaea rubra



Actaea pachypoda (alba) range map



Actaea racemosa



Actaea racemosa can grow in extensive stands with racemes growing up into the understory of shady forests.

Black and Blue Cohosh

- ▶ These are unrelated botanically and pharmacologically
- ▶ Both are bitter, pungent, sweet, dry, relaxant, and vital stimulant
- ▶ Black cohosh is somewhat **cool**
- ▶ Blue cohosh is somewhat **warm**
- ▶ Both are primarily **nervines**, affecting the other tissues through nervous tone.
- ▶ Both affect nerves, brain, smooth and skeletal muscles, mucous membranes, lungs and bronchial tract

- ▶ Black cohosh may also affect the **serous membranes**
- ▶ Blue cohosh affects the **cardiac muscle** (relevant to fetal toxicity)
- ▶ Both are nervine tonic, antispasmodic, uterine tonic, and somewhat emmenagogue
- ▶ Black cohosh is also **expectorant**
- ▶ Blue cohosh also relieves **irritation of the mucous membrane**
- ▶ Both are antispasmodic to the cough reflex.
- ▶ Black cohosh is **antidepressant** (the most often used antidepressant of the Eclectics)
- ▶ Black cohosh in higher doses affects the vaso-motor area of the hypothalamus and may reduce hot flashes in menopause (concentrated standardized extract)

Traditional uses of the pair

- ▶ Antispasmodic for the uterus
- ▶ Tonic for the atonic uterus: add Leonurus
- ▶ Antispasmodic for rheumatism
- ▶ Partus preparator (see cautions)
- ▶ Parturient (see cautions)

Cautions with obstetrical use

- ▶ Traditional native use of Blue Cohosh to prepare for childbirth is a false claim based on the report of "Indian Doctor" Peter Smith of Cincinnati, a white Protestant preacher. The report was reproduced by famous botanist Constantine Rafinesque in 1828, and then persisted in medical literature and practice.
- ▶ The Physiomedicalists used Blue cohosh as part of the Mother's Cordial formula from 1826 onward to the present. *Mitchella repens* (Partridge berry), *Caulophyllum thalictroides* (Blue cohosh), *Viburnum opulus* (Cramp bark), and *Chamaelirium luteum* (False unicorn)
- ▶ Traditional use in obstetrics is as a relatively high dose of the tea, or a low dose of the tincture.

Two infant fatalities

- ▶ In 1998, the death of an infant from heart failure immediately after birth was reported in the scientific literature, follow by a second case in the following year.
- ▶ In the 1998 death, the midwife had prescribed large doses of blue cohosh powder, rather than the traditional forms of decoction or tincture. The powder contain the alcohol soluble constituents at 30-60 times the concentration in tincture.
- ▶ The constituents affected the fetal heart muscle, causing hypertrophy and heart failure.
- ▶ http://medherb.com/Materia_Medica/Caulophyllum_-_Cardiotoxic_effects_of_Blue_Cohosh_on_a_fetus.htm
- ▶ http://medherb.com/Materia_Medica/Caulophyllum_-_Historical_use_of_Caulophyllum_in_Childbirth.htm

Actaea/Caullophyllum in childbirth

- ▶ The combination can strengthen inefficient contractions
- ▶ Typically used for stalled labor in the exhausted mother
- ▶ Should never be used to induce contractions or initiate labor.
- ▶ Promotes contractions, but does not ripen the os or initiate full labor.
- ▶ The result is hours/days of inefficient contractions, followed inevitably by surgical birth.

Rheumatism

- ▶ For more than 100 years Physiomedicalist physicians used a simple combination of Actaea and Phytolacca (caution) to treat "muscular rheumatism."
- ▶ The traditional use of Actaea is for heavy aching muscles, from whatever the cause: rheumatic processes, stages of fever, overexercise, etc.
- ▶ Actaea used in both acute and chronic rheumatism; Caullophyllum commonly used in acute rheumatism.
- ▶ May use the pair with the addition of Zanthoxylum

Gynecology

- ▶ Both plants used for menstrual cramping
- ▶ Both indicated for atonic states of the muscle
- ▶ Both indicated for ovarian pain: add Leonurus
- ▶ Caulophyllum relieves irritated tissues of uterus or the urethra (males/females)
- ▶ Both plants are emmenagogue, but this is secondary to the above effects.

Neurology

- ▶ Convulsions: Traditional use of Caulophyllum over 100 years of Physiomedicalist practice, combined with Lobelia.
- ▶ Actaea used in combination with Scutellaria for convulsions
- ▶ Actaea used for the headache of meningitis.
- ▶ Caulophyllum combined with Lobelia for headache
- ▶ Actaea used with Zanthoxylum for tinnitus.

Respiratory

- ▶ Both cohoshes are relaxant to the cough reflex
- ▶ Actaea is expectorant
- ▶ Caulophyllum is soothing to the irritable membranes
- ▶ Used for the spasmodic cough of Pertussis, asthma, or catarrhal cough, in combination as a pair with Lobelia
- ▶ Combine with herbs such as Aralia, Prunus, and or Lobelia.
- ▶ Wm Cook: 8 ounces of Actaea, 12 oz syrup simplex, 1 oz lobelia, for dry spasmodic cough
- ▶ T.J. Lyle: Caulophyllum and Lobelia 2 drams each in 4 ounces of syrup of Zingiber. ½ tsp per four hours for catarrhal cough.

Actaea and hot flashes

- ▶ Demonstrated with concentrated standardized extracts (Remifemin). Composition is proprietary and unknown. Dose is 40 mg of the concentrate.
- ▶ Constituents interact with the vaso-motor areas of the hypothalamus.
- ▶ Not a reliable effect with tinctures
- ▶ Remifemin may have adverse effects on the liver, producing changes in liver enzymes within a few weeks of use.
- ▶ Other side effects, besides frontal headache, are muscle tension and muscle pain.
- ▶ May interact with statin drugs to produce abnormal liver enzymes.

Actaea safety

- ▶ Classic side effect with dose too large or too long is a frontal headache.
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Taken persistently it may cause muscle and joint aches and pain, physical tension and headache.
- ▶ Standardized extracts may cause liver irritation as measured by elevated liver enzymes.
- ▶ Standardized extracts may interact with previously tolerated statin drugs to cause elevation of liver enzymes.

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