

Endangered Herb Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) by Abbie White 12/6/14

I am continuing to explore the endangered status of the cohosh herbs. Last month I looked at the botanically unrelated Black Cohosh. Next month I will profile White Cohosh. After studying Google images, I am fairly sure I have seen Blue Cohosh several times and have it in the woodlands near my house. Next summer I will make an effort to better document the locations of this plant and make sure there is no surrounding competition with poison ivy, barberry, and bittersweet. The large, bright blue berries are very striking and stand out to me as being toxic. Interestingly, one recent herbal reference mentions that the berries are poisonous. However, I found historical literature mentioning that the seeds were roasted as a coffee substitute.



<http://joebartok.blogspot.com/2011/09/mystery-solved.html>

From my research I have little concern about the reckless harvesting of Blue Cohosh for medicinal purposes since this plant seems to be used much less in comparison to Black Cohosh. From web surfing and finding sisterzeus.com, it appears that the primary use of this herb appears to be as an abortifacient. Of concern, is that the medical literature cites reports of Blue Cohosh being the direct cause of newborn heart birth defects and convinces me enough to state that this herb should not be used to induce or hasten labor.

Tracing the history of Blue Cohosh shows extensive use by the Native Americans. A medical text titled "New Remedies: Their Pathogenetic Effects and Therapeutical Application in Homoeopathic Practice", by EM Hale, published in 1864, devotes several pages to describing the many applications of this herb, dosing, and several case studies from around the country. Evidently, the author is very enthusiastic about Blue Cohosh. This text in Google Books is well worth adding to your EBook library.

CAULOPHYLLUM THALICTROIDES.

(*Blue Cohosh. Squaw Root.*)

This is a smooth, glaucous plant, purple when young, with a high round stem, from one to three feet high, simple, from knotted and matted rootstalks, and dividing above into two parts, one of which is a triternate leaf-stalk, the other bears a biternate leaf, and a racemous panicle of small yellowish-green flowers, which appear in May and June. Panicle small, darker than the leaves. *Pericarp* thin, caducous, dark blue, resembling berries on thick stipes. Seeds one or two about the size of a large pea, erect and globose. It is a handsome perennial plant, growing all over the United States, in low, moist, rich grounds, near running streams or on grounds which have been overflowed with water. The seeds ripen in the latter part of the summer and are said to form an excellent substitute for coffee, when roasted. The fruit is dry, sweet, insipid, and resembles that of the *Vaccinium*. The officinal part is the root, which is sweetish, somewhat pungent and aromatic, and affords a yellow infusion or tincture. The resinoid, active principle of this root, is called *Caulophyllin*, and may be used instead of the tincture in nearly all cases. In the following clinical experience, it will be stated which preparation was used in the prescription. In our school *Caulophyllin* has been most used. I believe I was the first to call attention to this remedy. The original article was published in the *North American Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 373; since which time it has been quite extensively used. The first mention that I find of it, by any medical writer, is in the work of John Thomson—author of the so-called “*Thomsonian Practice* ;” who, after mentioning its employment by the Indian females to expedite delivery, and to relieve uterine pain and spasm, reports a case of inflammation of the uterus, cured rapidly by a decoction of the

root. It is also highly spoken of by Smith, Matison, Beach and other “botanic” writers; but the best description of the plant, and resume of its properties and uses, is to be found in King’s Dispensatory. He says: “It is principally used as an *emmenagogue*, *parturient* and *anti-spasmodic* ; but it likewise possesses diuretic, diaphoretic and anthelmintic properties. It has been successfully employed in *rheumatism*, *dropsy*, *colic*, *cramps*, *hiccough*, *epilepsy*, *hysteria*, *uterine inflammation*, etc. It is a valuable agent in all *chronic uterine diseases*.” Other writers, as Jones and Scudder (*Mat. Med.*) and Coe, (*Conc. Org. Med.*) give the same statement of its virtues. If I were to compare any of our well-known remedies with it, I should name *Asa f.*, *Platina*, *Secale*, *Murex*, and perhaps *Pulsatilla*.

GENERAL EFFECTS.—Sensation of comfortable languor and disposition to sleep. A fine prickling sensation all over the body. Increased mental and physical vigor. Tremulous weakness of the whole system.

A worthwhile herbal substitute would be Black Cohosh obtained from a sustainable harvest. Let’s start a dialog on where we find Blue Cohosh growing locally and make our own assessment of the state of the native population. Also, I would be curious to know if you find anyone that actually harvests this plant.