

*Actaea spicata*

[Synonyms : *Actaea alba*, *Actaea nigra*, *Actaea racemosa*, *Actaea rubra*, *Actaea spicata* var. *alba*, *Christophoriana spicata*]

**BANE BERRY** is a perennial. Native to Asia, and Europe it has pure white flowers with many protruding white stamens.

It is also known as *Actée en épi* (French), Black baneberry of Europe, Black cohosh, Black snakeroot, Bugbane, *Christophskraut* (German), Common baneberry, Dolls-eyes, Herb Christopher, *Hexenkraut* (German), *Mustakonna-marja* (Finnish), *Raisin du diable* (French), St. Christopher's herb, *Samorastlik klasnatý* (Czech), *Samorostlik klasnatý* (Czech), *Svart trolldruva* (Swedish), Toadroot, *Trolldbaer* (Norwegian), and *Trolldruva* (Swedish).

The plant has an offensive smell and acrid taste.

Warning – the whole plant (particularly the berries) is poisonous. It can cause headaches, dizziness, severe gastroenteritis, increased pulse, delirium, diarrhoea and vomiting. The symptoms can subside harmlessly after 3 hours but child deaths have been recorded.

*Spicata* is derived from Latin *spica* (ear of corn, spike) meaning 'spiky, spiked or in spikes' with reference to the flowers.

It is suggested by some that the name Toadroot arose not only because both toads and baneberries like similar habitats but also because the toads appear to be attracted by the plant's offensive smell. Authorities offer several explanations for the name Herb Christopher. One in particular points out that originally the poisonous plant was closely associated with magic and evil, that its roots (in cross-section) form the shape of a cross or star, and that St. Christopher was the patron saint of wizards.

A black dye can be obtained from the fruit.

Medicinally, European herbalists used to recommend a tincture of the roots for treating asthma, muscular rheumatism, hysteria, fluid retention, whooping cough, skin disease and some heart and lung disorders. It was also known as a cure for the nerve disease St. Vitus Dance.