

Ageratina altissima

[Synonyms : *Ageratina ageratoides*, *Ageratina altissima* var. *altissima*, *Ageratina altissima* var. *angustata*, *Ageratum altissimum*, *Ageratina ligustrina*, *Batchea nivea*, *Batschia nivea*, *Eupatorium aboriginum*, *Eupatorium ageratoides*, *Eupatorium ageratoides* var. *angustatum*, *Eupatorium angustatum*, *Eupatorium boreale*, *Eupatorium cordatum* var. *fraseri*, *Eupatorium eurybiaefolium*, *Eupatorium fraseri*, *Eupatorium frasieri*, *Eupatorium roanense*, *Eupatorium roanensis*, *Eupatorium rugosum*, *Eupatorium rugosum* var. *angustatum*, *Eupatorium rugosum* var. *chlorolepis*, *Eupatorium rugosum* var. *rugosum*, *Eupatorium rugosum* var. *tomentellum*, *Eupatorium rugosum* var. *villicaule*, *Eupatorium urticaefolium*, *Eupatorium urticifolium*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* var. *angustatum*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* forma *congesta*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* var. *tomentellum*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* var. *trifolium*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* var. *urticifolium*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* forma *verticillatum*, *Eupatorium urticifolium* var. *villicaule*, *Kyrstenia aboriginum*, *Kyrstenia altissima*, *Kyrstenio angustata*, *Kyrstenia borealis*]

WHITE SNAKEROOT is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has tiny white flowers.

It is also known as Deerwort, Deerwort boneset, Hardy age, Indian sanicle, Milk ipecac, Milk sick, Mist flower, Poolwort, Rich weed, *Rostflockel* (Swedish), Snakeroot, Squaw weed, Thoroughwort, *Valkolatva* (Finnish), White sanicle, and White top.

Warning – the whole plant is poisonous. It can cause breath smelling of acetone or pear drops, abdominal pain, vomiting, constipation, thirst, liver disorders, weakness, collapse, coma and death. It can enter the food chain if milk or meat etc. from an animal or bird which has ingested it is, itself, eaten by human beings. It is also poisonous for animals, especially cattle, horses and sheep.

Altissima means ‘tallest or very tall’..

In areas where white snakeroot thrives humans are only vulnerable to poisoning if dairy cattle are inadequately controlled eg. subsistence farming, whereby the milk could be contaminated by any cow which had eaten the plant. In humans the fatal illness caused by this plant was known locally, in western States of North America (before farming controls were introduced), as ‘milk sickness’ and in cattle it was called ‘trembles’. Here in particular deaths from this illness were common among the early settlers. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) is said to have had firsthand experience. His mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln (1784-1818), is understood to have been one of the victims. The family had only settled in south-western Indiana for two years before the future first president of the United States lost his mother to milk sickness in 1818 when he was nine. It was over 100 years (1928) before the cause was known and the culprit, white snakeroot, isolated by researchers.

Medicinally, the plant has been used in folk practice in the past.