

Apocynum cannabinum

[Synonyms : *Apocynum album*, *Apocynum androsaemifolium* var. *nevadense*, *Apocynum angustifolium*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *angustifolium*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *glaberrimum*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *greeneanum*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *hypericifolium*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *nemorale*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *pubescens*, *Apocynum cannabinum* var. *suksdorfii*, *Apocynum cannabium*, *Apocynum hyperfolium*, *Apocynum hypericifolium*, *Apocynum pubescens*, *Apocynum sibiricum*, *Apocynum sibiricum*, *Apocynum sibiricum* var. *cordigerum*, *Apocynum sibiricum* var. *farwellii*, *Apocynum sibiricum* var. *salignum*, *Apocynum suksdorfii*, *Apocynum suksdorfii* var. *angustifolium*, *Apocynum viride*, *Cynopaema cannabinum*]

CANADIAN HEMP is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has tiny whitish-green flowers.

It is also known as American hemp, *Amerikanischer Hanf* (German), Amyroot, Bitter root, Black Indian hemp, Bowman's root, *Cáñamo indio* (Spanish), *Chanvre du Canada* (French), Choctaw root, Coctaw root, Common dogsbane, Dogbane hemp, Dogsbane, *Fliegenfänger* (German), General Marion's weed, Glabrous hemp, *Hanfartiger Hundswürger* (German), Hemp dogbane, Indian hemp, Indian physic, *Kanadische Hanfwurzel* (German), Milkweed, North-and-South root, Old Amy root, Rheumatism root, Rheumatism weed, Riverbank-dogbane, St. John's dogbane, Silk weed, Snake's milk, Velvet dogbane, Wandering milkweed, White Indian hemp, and Wild cotton.

The flowers exude a sweet liquid to attract insects that are then trapped in the throat. They are also pollinated by monarch butterflies.

Warning – Canadian hemp is a poisonous plant requiring the greatest caution. It can have a cumulative effect and can cause violent vomiting, mild diarrhoea, dilated pupils, increased pulse, high temperature, rejection of food or drink and death. It is poisonous for animals.

Canadian hemp can be confused in appearance with bitter root (*Apocynum androsaemifolium*). The distinction between the two (the latter has obvious groups of thick-walled cells in the outer root bark) would seem to rest primarily in the hands of professionals..

Cannabinum is derived from the genus name *Cannabis* meaning 'like hemp (*Cannabis sativa*)'. North American Indian tribes do not appear to have recognised Canadian hemp's poisonous potential as it is documented today. The milky latex offered a source of chewing gum for both the Isleta and Kiowa tribes and the latter even prepared two different kinds from it. The Karok Indians ate the seeds raw.

As an alternative to hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) the fibrous bark was used by many local Indian tribes (including the Kiowa) for cordage ranging from thread, weaving material, twine, cord and rope used for making fishing nets, baskets, clothing, mats and twine. More specifically records show that the sewing thread was used by the Kutenai tribe for their tepee covers, and the Shuswap Indians used it for sewing buckskin and baskets. When woven into material of varying qualities the Cherokee made it into shrouds, the Thompson Indians used it for making crop storage sacks, the Luiseño tribe made aprons out of it – and the Mendocino Indian tribe and the Thompson tribe both fashioned it into clothing. String was used by the Luiseño tribe for bowstrings, Shuswap Indians used this

for horses' bridles, and the Nez Perce wove it into bags. Twine was also used for matting by the Paiute, and cord was used for nets and snares by some of the Okanagan-Colville as well as the Paiute, Songish, Thompson, Luiseño and Yuki Indians.

For the Kutenai Indians the plant tops provided an eye medicine for horses.

It was once a veritable medicine chest for many North American Indian tribes. In the past the Kiowa for instance used it particularly as a heart stimulant and a remedy for fluid retention. Records also indicate that it was used by the Cherokee to treat asthma, whooping cough and rheumatism, and that they and the Meskwaki prescribed it for some kidney disorders. The Iroquois and Blackfoot tribes (and some of the Cree Indians) all used Canadian hemp as a laxative, and the Micmac, Penobscot and Menominee tribes used it to expel worms. For some of the Navajo Indians the plant provided a remedy for various stomach pains, and the Iroquois gave it to children who were suffering from diarrhoea. Some venereal diseases were treated with it by the Thompson tribe, and it was used to cause vomiting by the Iroquois and some of the Cree. In addition the root was used by the Okanagan-Colville Indians as a contraceptive. Its believed medical qualities were introduced to the European settlers by local North American Indian tribes.

Today the bark fibre is used commercially for cordage, ropes, sails, fishing nets and coarse linen. The indiarubber texture of the dried latex has suggested to some authorities that the plant could be a source of 'rubber' during times of shortages.

Medicinally, it has been used in North American folk medicine for the treatment of fluid retention, fever and worms, and it was also employed as a powerful heart stimulant. Today however Canadian hemp is no longer in use medicinally because of its highly poisonous qualities.