

Aralia racemosa

AMERICAN SPIKENARD is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has many small, greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as American nard, *Amerikanische Narde* (German), *Aralia*, *Aralia groniasta* (Polish), *Aralie à grappe* (French), *Bergangelika* (German), False sarsparilla, Gout root, Goutwort, Hungry root, Indian root, Indian spikenard, King-of-the-woods, Life-of-man, *Lundaralia* (Swedish), Manroot, Nard, Old maid's root, Old man's root, Pettymorell, Pigeon weed, Spiceberry, Spicebush, Spignet, Spignut, Spikenard, *Terttuaralia* (Finnish), Whiteroot, Wild elder, *Wilde Sarsaparilla* (German), and Wild spikenard.

Racemosa is derived from Latin *racemus* (cluster) meaning 'with a spike of stalked flowers up the stem'.

The root once featured in North American Indian cookery. One recipe which the Menominee particularly delighted in combined American spikenard with Canadian garlic (a native prickly gooseberry not *Allium canadense*) and a sweetener, and the young tips have provided an addition to soup long enjoyed by the Potawatomi Indians. It has also been used in beers and wines.

The Chippewa Indian tribe found that a root decoction was a useful repellent if a particular type of lizard became a nuisance.

Some of the tribes also used the root for medicinal purposes. It was taken as a drink for stomach ache particularly by the Menominee, it was included in poultices applied to sores, wounds or burns (not least by the Cherokee, Micmac, Iroquois, Choctaw and Chippewa Indians) and it was also used by various tribes in the treatment of blood poisoning. The Algonkin tribe used the root as an ingredient in treatment for diabetes, and they and the Micmac, Iroquois and Malecite tribes all included it in remedies for tuberculosis. Records show that the Chippewa Indians used the root for healing broken bones or for strained muscles, while the Iroquois are known to have used it for treating diarrhoea, some forms of worms, rheumatism and some liver disorders. They with the Penobscot, Malecite and Micmac tribes also used it for various kidney problems and for some venereal diseases. Both the Malecite and Micmac tribes seem to have used it in some form for easing headaches and colds, and they and the Cherokee, Chippewa and Iroquois Indians all included it in various treatments for some period and other female problems. If the foregoing is not sufficient to indicate the medicinal importance of American spikenard to local Indian tribes, it was also used by the Choctaw tribe for children's wind, by the Choctaw and Micmac tribes for some eye ailments, and by the Cherokee to cause perspiration. Then among records one also finds that it provided a flavouring for medicines generally for members of the Meskwaki tribe.

The root once provided the main flavouring in a popular North American summer drink.

Medicinally, the roots have been used by North American herbalists to treat syphilis, indigestion, rheumatism, gout, wounds and respiratory diseases. Today it can still be employed in helping to resolve some period problems.