

*Aralia spinosa*

[Synonyms : *Angelica spinosa*, *Aralia leroana*, *Aralia spinosa* forma *subinermis*]

**HERCULES' CLUB** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to Japan and the eastern United States (especially Virginia) it has small greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as American angelica tree, Angelica tree, *Aralia kolczasta* (Polish), *Aralie épineuse* (French), Club of Hercules, Devil's walking stick, *Duo ci song mu* (Chinese), False prickly ash, *Länneraralia* (Finnish), *Mei guo song mu* (Chinese), Prickly ash, Prickly elder, Rattlesnake's master, *Shaggaret el malak* (Arabic), *Taggaralia* (Swedish), Toothache bush, and Toothache tree.

Yellow essential oil can be extracted from the bark.

Warning – fresh bark, root and berries may be poisonous. They may cause purging and vomiting if taken internally in large amounts. Externally the bark and root may cause dermatitis.

*Spinosa* is Latin (thorn, spine) meaning 'spiny' with reference to the stems and leaves.

Medicinally, the plant's roots were used by various North American Indian tribes in different ways eg. the Choctaw, Cherokee and Rappahannock Indians applied boiled and mashed root to boils, the Koasati Indians used roots which had been steeped in cold water to treat sore eyes, and the Cherokee also used parts of the shrub in remedies for rheumatism and some venereal disease. They used it to ease toothache too, and to cause sweating and vomiting.

Negro slaves in North America applied freshly powdered root bark to snake bites and also took the powder internally as a remedy for the bite. While in Japan the essential oil extracted from the bark has been taken as a tonic and used as a vehicle to induce sweating. The plant has also been considered to be a medicinal alternative for the prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*). A tincture of the berries (with other ingredients) has been used in the treatment of cholera, violent wind and rheumatism, and also to dull the pain of decaying teeth. A tincture of the bark has provided a remedy for rheumatism too, as well as syphilis and skin diseases.