

*Arisaema triphyllum*

[Synonyms : *Arisaema acuminatum*, *Arisaema atrorubens*, *Arisaema pusillum*, *Arisaema quinatum*, *Arum strobiliferum*, *Arum triphyllum*]

**AMERICAN WAKE ROBIN** is a perennial. Native to North America (particularly the eastern side eg. Florida, Texas), it has a spike (spadix) of tiny greenish-yellow flowers shielded by a streaked, petal-like purplish-brown on the inside and purplish-green outside leaf (spathe).

It is also known as Adam's apple, Bog-onion, Brown dragon, Cooter-wampee, Cuckoo pint, Cuckoo plant, Devil's ear, Dragonroot, Dragon turnip, *Feuerkolben* (German), Hopnis, Indian cherries, Indian cradle, *Indianerfeuerkolben* (German), Indian turnip, Iroquois breadroot, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Lady-in-a-chaise, Lords and ladies, Marsh turnip, Meadow turnip, Memory root, *Mikasi-maka* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), *Nikso kororik kahtsu nitawau* (Pawnee North American Indian), Parson-in-the-pulpit, Pepper turnip, Plant of peace, Preacher-in-the-pulpit, Priest's pintle, Starchwort, Swamp cherries, Swamp turnip, Thrice-leaved arum, Thrice-leaved Indian turnip, Tuckahoe, Wakeribin, Wakerobin, Wampee, Wild pepper, Wild turnip, and Woodland Jack-in-the-pulpit.

Warning – it can only be used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. The whole plant (with the exception of the dried, aged and processed root) can cause intense burning and irritation in the mouth (usually sufficient to prevent swallowing which could cause violent gastroenteritis and death). Handling the fresh plant may cause blistering.

*Triphyllum* is made up of Greek *tri-* (three) and *phyllo-* (leaf) components.

The pungent tuberous underground stem was cooked for three days in a pit oven (to destroy its poisonous properties) and eaten by local North American Indian tribes especially the Potawatomi.

The seeds were used to make rattles by the Pawnee North American Indian tribe who put them inside gourds. They were also used in Meskwaki rituals which foretold the recovery or death of a patient.

Some records suggest that both the Meskwaki and Mohican tribes were only too aware of the plant's poisonous nature and that they may have used it in the past to poison enemies in times of conflict.

Few tribes seem to have found the plant useful in veterinary medicine, although records suggest that the Iroquois included it in feed given to their pregnant mares to induce the birth.

The Menominee tribe (whose name for the plant means 'the bear's eye') are said to have applied a poultice of pounded root to sore eyes, a treatment that would appear to be incredibly severe. (The Iroquois and Chippewa tribes also used the plant for treating some eye problems.) The Pawnee, the Cherokee and the Iroquois are said to have chosen it to treat headaches, and the latter also used it for coughs and colds. Pawnee Indians turned to it as a remedy for easing rheumatism and both the Mohican and Iroquois tribes used it for pain. The Meskwaki turned to the root for treating rattlesnake bites, and they also used the plant to counter sleeplessness. It was valued by the Iroquois for easing children's diarrhoea, and they and the Cherokee included it in remedies for tuberculosis. Not least the Penobscot, Cherokee and Iroquois tribes all chose parts of the plant for dealing with skin sores, and the Micmac, Malecite, Cherokee and Rappahannock Indians

used it in treating boils. For the Mohican tribe it was a gargle ingredient (a gargle of which not even one drop could be safely swallowed).

Despite the whole plant's poisonous nature authorities note that some records have shown that the peppery tasting berries have been eaten raw without ill effect.

American wake robin is the subject of a striking and celebrated group of modern paintings known as *The Jack-in-the-Pulpit* series by the celebrated American artist Georgia O'Keefe (1887-1986). Authorities describe how realism, when the series is viewed at a distance, is progressively converted to an abstract representation as the collection draws the eye further into the plant.

Authorities believe that American wake robin has been grown in Britain since about the mid-1700s.

Medicinally, the plant has been used in the past by North American herbalists to treat respiratory disorders including asthma, bronchitis and whooping cough, and it has also been included in remedies for rheumatism and wind.