

*Asclepias incarnata*

**SWAMP MILKWEED** is a perennial. Native to North America it has small fragrant, rose-purple or flesh pink (rarely white) flowers.

It is also known as *Asclépiade rouge* (French), Flesh-colored asclepias, Flesh-colored silkweed, Flesh-coloured asclepias, Ozone fibre, Pink swamp milkweed, *Purppurasilkkiyrtti* (Finnish), Rabbit milk, Red milkweed, Rose-coloured silkweed, Rose milkweed, *Rosensidenört* (Swedish), *Rote Seidenpflanze* (German), Silkplant, Swamp silkweed, Water nerve-root, and White Indian hemp.

Warning – the whole plant is poisonous. Apart from a strong laxative effect on humans it is also believed to be able to cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, salivation, muscle paralysis, cramps and death, and the milky latex can irritate the skin. It is alleged that grazing livestock ie. sheep, have been killed by eating it but it is usually avoided by them.

*Incarnata* means ‘flesh pink-coloured’.

The buds were eaten as a delicacy with venison by the Menominee Indians of North America and were also added to soup and to cornmeal mush as well as being dried for Winter consumption.

The bark is a source of the tough ‘Ozone fibre’ that is understood to have considerable strength and is finer than hemp (*Cannabis sativa*). (The fibre was used by the North American Chippewa tribe in the form of twine.)

Several Indian tribes had faith in the plant’s ability to impart physical strength. This belief is well illustrated by records that describe how a plant infusion was taken by an Iroquois Indian who had the task of punishing a witch.

One or two North American Indian tribes including the Chippewa recognized swamp milkweed as a source of several medicines. The Iroquois (and the Meskwaki) used the plant to treat fluid retention, and used the stems as twine to help take out teeth. The Meskwaki also used the roots to expel tapeworms and to cause vomiting.

Medicinally, the roots have been used by North American herbalists to treat fluid retention, diarrhoea, dysentery, various respiratory ailments (including asthma, catarrh, coughs, and colds) rheumatism, intestinal worms and some skin diseases.