

Baptisia tinctoria

[Synonyms : *Baptisia gibbesii*, *Baptisia tinctoria* var. *crebra*, *Baptisia tinctoria* var. *projecta*, *Podalyria tinctoria*, *Sophora tinctoria*]

WILD INDIGO is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has small pea-like, bright yellow flowers.

It is also known as American indigo, Baptisia, *Baptisie* (German), Clover broom, Dyer's baptisia, False indigo, Horseflea weed, Horsefly, Horsefly weed, Indigo broom, *Indigo sauvage* (French), Indigo weed, *Keltaetelänherne* (Finnish), Rattlebush, Rattle weed, Shoo fly, *Wilder Indigo* (German), Yellow broom, Yellow indigo, and Yellow wild indigo.

Warning – all parts of the plant may be poisonous, and large doses could be purgative and could cause vomiting. It can be fatal for some animals.

Tinctoria is derived from Latin *tinctus* (dyed, stained, tinged) meaning 'used in dyeing'.

For people living in the more mountainous areas of eastern North America, including some of the Chippewa and Cherokee tribes, wild indigo was not only the source of a dye but also provided a fly-brush.

In parts of the north-eastern seaboard of North America the tender young shoots have been picked and prepared as an alternative to asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*).

Some North American Indians used the root in the treatment of cancer, and the Meskwaki, Mohican, and Delaware tribes used a root decoction as an antiseptic for wounds. For the Micmac and Penobscot Indians the plant offered remedies for haemorrhaging and for some kidney and venereal problems. It was used medicinally by the Chippewa tribe, and Nanticoke Indians sometimes used it for sprains. The Cherokee and Delaware tribes both turned to it for treating some female disorders, and the Cherokee used it for easing vomiting and toothache, and as a purgative too. Records suggest that the Iroquois used wild indigo as a remedy for liver disorders and rheumatism.

The pods are sometimes used today in dried flower arrangements.

Medicinally, the plant was used by herbalists especially for treating typhus. Today it is found in remedies for arthritis and inflammatory disorders (such as throat and mouth infections). It can also be an ingredient in ointments used for skin ulcers and sore nipples.