

Chimaphila umbellata

[Synonyms : *Chimaphila corymbosa*, *Chimaphila occidentalis*, *Pyrola fructicans*, *Pyrola umbellata*]

PIPSISSEWA is an evergreen shrub. Found in temperate parts of Asia, Europe (excluding Britain) and North America, it has small purple-centred, fragrant, white or pinkish flowers.

It is also known as Bittersweet, Bitter wintergreen, Common pipsissewa, Common wintergreen, Fragrant wintergreen, Green pipsissewa, Ground holly, King's cure, Love in winter, Noble pine, Pine tulip, Plain pipsissewa, Prince's pine, Prince's pride, Princess pine, Pyrole, Rheumatism weed, *Ryl* (Swedish), Spotted wintergreen, Umbellate wintergreen, Western prince's pine, Wintergreen, and *Zimozelen okoličnatý* (Czech).

Warning – pipsissewa can cause dermatitis.

Umbellata is derived from Latin *umbella* (parasol) meaning 'bearing flattish-heads of flowers with stalks arising from one place'.

Pipsissewa was familiar to local North American Indians. Both the Blackfoot and Montana Indian tribes smoked the leaves as a tobacco.

For the Rappahannock Indians the shrub offered a medicine that they gave to their mules.

The Menominee (as well as the Thompson Indians and some of the Okanagan-Colville tribe) harvested it for a medicine for treating various female disorders and for use during childbirth – and the Menominee also appreciated it as a medicine flavourer. It was taken for some blood disorders by several tribes, including the Malecite, Micmac, Okanagan-Colville, Menominee, Delaware and Rappahannock. Some of the Cree tribe prescribed pipsissewa to stem internal bleeding and in the treatment of some heart disorders too, and like the Delaware they used it as one of the remedies for various lung disorders. It could be found in Okanagan-Colville, Malecite, Micmac and Delaware treatments specifically addressing tuberculosis, while the Micmac, Chippewa and Rappahannock Indians used the shrub in remedies for some stomach ailments. On the one hand the Montagnais Indians used a plant decoction to cause sweating – and on the other, both the Montana Indian tribe and the Nanticoke Indians prescribed a plant decoction or infusion to ease fever. Some kidney disorders were treated with it by the Micmac, Okanagan-Colville and Kutenai tribes, and the Delaware and Micmac Indians both used it for some urinary problems. The latter also turned to pipsissewa in the treatment of smallpox. The humble cold was eased by it in the Okanagan-Colville and Abnaki tribes. Chippewa and Delaware Indians used the shrub in remedies for some venereal diseases, and the former, as well as the Kutenai and Flathead Indians, turned to the plant for treating various eye problems. Pipsissewa featured in the arsenal of treatments used by the Karok and Catawba tribes, and some of the Cree Indians chose it for easing backache, while the Micmac and Saanich Indians used it for rheumatism. Not least the Thompson tribe and some of the Okanagan-Colville applied appropriate parts of the shrub to swellings on the legs or feet, and the latter tribe (and the Rappahannock) both recommended it as an appetite enhancer.

Today the shrub provides a commercial ingredient employed by both the food and cosmetic industries.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend the bruised fresh leaves in external treatment of rheumatism and kidney and heart diseases, while a decoction was given for gonorrhoea. It was also used in treating diabetes, fluid retention and skin diseases. Today it is primarily employed in the treatment of rheumatism and kidney disorders – and it is also used in homoeopathic treatments.