

*Dioscorea communis*

[Synonyms : *Tamus communis*, *Tamus cordifolia*, *Tamus cretica*, *Tamus edulis*, *Tamus racemosa*]

**BLACK BRYONY** is an anti-clockwise twining climbing vine. Native to central and southern Europe and to the Mediterranean, it has tiny yellowish-green flowers and leaves that turn dark purple or bright yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as Adder's meat, Adder's poison, Beadbine, Black bindweed, Black briony, Blackeye root, Black vine, *Brionia negra* (Spanish), Briony, Broyant, Bryony, Chilblain berry, *Corriola de cavall* (Catalan, Spanish), Devil's berry, Devil's cherry, *Djävulsdruva* (Swedish), *Echte Schmerwurz* (German), *Gatmaimó* (Catalan, Spanish), *Gwinwydden Ddu* (Welsh), *Herbe aux femmes battues* (French), Isle of Wight vine, *Jomfruod* (Danish), Lady's seal, *Lupios* (Spanish), Madonna's needle, *Maimó* (Catalan, Spanish), Mandrake, Murraim berries, Murren berries, *Nueza negra* (Spanish), Oxberry, *Pirítogyokér* (Hungarian), Poison berry, Poisoning berries, Roll berry, Row berry, Rue berry, *Schmerwurz* (German), Snake berry, Snake's food, Snake's meat, *Spekwortel* (Dutch), *Tamaro* (Italian), *Taminier* (French), *Tamus obecný* (Czech), *Vigne noire* (French), Virgin's root, Wild vine, and Withywinny.

Warning – black bryony is poisonous (especially the roots and berries). Its sap can cause skin allergies and blisters. It should only be taken internally under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. Internally an overdose can cause burning sensations in the mouth, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, purging, abdominal pain, muscular paralysis and death. The plant is poisonous for some animals.

Black bryony although enjoying a similar habitat has no relationship to white bryony (*Bryonia dioica*).

*Communis* means 'common, general or growing with'.

Boiled young shoots are eaten like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) in some countries.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek physician, Pedanius Dioscorides, is said to have recommended the use of the berries to remove freckles.

In the Middle Ages Europeans were using the root as a medicine to cause vomiting ie. an emetic, and the fruit have long been used also for treating chilblains (for which purpose in many places such as the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England the berries were preserved in gin or brandy for use in the bad Winter weather). Apart from these examples black bryony has not attracted much attention medicinally except in some homoeopathic remedies.