

Echinacea angustifolia

[Synonyms : *Brauneria angustifolia*, *Brauneria pallida*, *Echinacea angustifolia* var. *angustifolia*, *Echinacea angustifolia* var. *strigosa*, *Echinacea pallida* var. *angustifolia*, *Echinacea pallida* var. *strigosa*]

BLACK SAMPSON is a perennial. Native to central and eastern United States, it has daisy-like, rich purple (occasionally white) flowers.

It is also known as Black sampson coneflower, Blacksamson echinacea, Coneflower, Cornflower, Echinacea, *Ichahpe-hu* (Dakota North American Indian), *Kaitapäivänhattu* (Finnish), Kansas niggerhead, Kansas snakeroot, *Ksapitahako* (Pawnee North American Indian), *Mika-hi* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Narrowleaf coneflower, Narrowleaf echinacea, Narrowleaved coneflower, Narrow-leaved purple coneflower, Niggerhead, *Punahattu* (Finnish), Purple coneflower, Rattlesnake weed, Rudbeckia (English, Swedish), Sampson root, and *Schmalblättriges Sonnenhut* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of justice.

Angustifolia is derived from Latin *angusti-* (narrow) and *-folia* (leaved) components.

In the United States black sampson can be called Cornflower (cornflower in Britain is *Centaurea cyanus*). Translation of two of the North American Indian names for black sampson are ‘comb plant’ and ‘widow’s comb’. These were used by tribes in the Missouri River area – and probably others as the Meskwaki tribe’s name for the plant also meant ‘widow’s comb’. It would seem to indicate its use as a brush or comb and indeed women in the Kiowa tribe are believed to have been using the dried flower heads for this purpose even as recently as 70 odd years ago.

Among North American Indian tribes black sampson acquired a high reputation, particularly for its medicinal qualities, but different tribes tended to use it in different ways. The Kiowa Indians chewed and swallowed the juice from the root to cure coughs and sore throats. The Cheyenne and some of the Dakota used black sampson to treat various other oral problems, and the latter chewed the stems to quench thirst. But its original reputation among Indian tribes, including most of those mentioned here, sprang from its use in the treatment of snake bites (for the Montana Indian tribe rattlesnakes particularly) and wounds, as well as stings and sores. The Sioux used it for snake bites and also considered black sampson to be a remedy for rabies. Some tribes such as the Dakota, Ponca, Pawnee, Omaha and Winnebago used smoke inhalation as a remedy for headaches, the root was administered for treating spasms, and the plant was used by for instance the Omaha, Blackfoot, Ponca, Pawnee, Winnebago, Cheyenne and Dakota Indians to ease toothache. A decoction of the plant was believed to make parts of the body more insensitive to heat and it was used in easing the pain of burns. Records suggest that not only was this applied beneficially in many tribes before taking a steam bath but also that it was used to dramatic effect by some, such as the Dakota and Winnebago, to enable entertainers to remove meat or other objects from boiling water with their bare hands or place a live coal inside the mouth (if the skin had been bathed in a decoction beforehand). On top of this most of the aforementioned tribes also viewed black sampson as an antidote for many poisons and used the plant in a poultice applied to glands swollen on patients suffering from mumps. The Omaha used it to treat some eye problems too and some of the Dakota

prescribed it for easing stomach upsets.

In veterinary medicine the plant was chosen by many North American Indian tribes, including the Omaha, Ponca, Dakota, Pawnee and Winnebago to treat distemper in horses.

Possibly of even greater interest medicinally however was that 100-150 years ago the United States Dispensatory declared that a tincture of the dried root increased infection resistance. This statement would appear to be valid today as it is supported not only by the experience gained in folk medicine but also more recent scientific research.

Medicinally, today the plant is used in the treatment of skin diseases, wounds and various respiratory ailments.