

Galium boreale

[Synonyms : *Galium bermudense*, *Galium boreale* var. *hyssopifolium*, *Galium boreale* var. *intermedium*, *Galium boreale* var. *linearifolium*, *Galium boreale* var. *scabrum*, *Galium boreale* subsp. *sensu*, *Galium boreale* subsp. *septentrionale*, *Galium boreale* var. *typicum*, *Galium borealis*, *Galium brachiatum*, *Galium brachiatum* subsp. *sensu*, *Galium circaeoides*, *Galium circaezans* var. *circaezans*, *Galium circaezans* var. *glabellum*, *Galium circaezans* var. *glabrum*, *Galium circaezans* var. *typicum*, *Galium hyssopifolium*, *Galium rotundifolium* var. *circaezans*, *Galium septentrionale*, *Galium strictum*]

NORTHERN BEDSTRAW is a perennial. Native to northern Asia, to Europe and to northern North America, it has tiny white flowers.

It is also known as *Ahomatara* (Finnish), Alpine bedstraw, Bedstraw, *Briwydden Mynyddog-Creigiog* (Welsh), Cleavers, Licorice bedstraw, Northern snow bedstraw, Snow bedstraw, *Svízel severní* (Czech), *Trenervet Snerre* (Danish), *Vitmåra* (Swedish), and Wild baby's breath.

The plant turns black when it has dried.

The flowers are pollinated by flies and beetles.

Boreale is derived from Greek *boreo* (north) meaning 'northern'.

The common name Northern bedstraw takes note of its use in bygone days as a mattress stuffing.

Both the Cree North American Indians and the Great Basin Indian tribe obtained a purplish-red dye from the roots – the former used this on porcupine quills. (Mixed with cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) or strawberry juice (*Potentilla*) it is also said to have yielded a scarlet vegetable dye.)

The plant was a source of medicine for some North American tribes. The Choctaw Indians and some of the Cree used it to treat fluid retention and the former also used it both as a contraceptive and to cause sweating.

Young leaves can be cooked like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) and the ground seeds can offer an alternative for coffee.

Northern bedstraw is eaten by some deer and on occasion by ducks and geese as well.

Medicinally, local herbalists have recommended a plant decoction as a contraceptive.