

Gillenia trifoliata

[Synonyms : *Porteranthus trifoliatus*, *Spiraea stipulata*, *Spiraea trifoliata*]

INDIAN PHYSIC is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has small pinkish-tinged, white flowers.

It is also known as American ipecac, American ipecacuanha, Beaumont root, Bowman's root, Dropwort, False ipecac, Fawn's breath, Gillenia, Indian hippo, Ipecac, Ipecacuanha, Meadowsweet, Three-leaved spiroea, Virginia ipecacuanha, and Western dropwort.

Warning – Indian physic is a poisonous plant. Large doses can cause nausea, vomiting and purging.

Trifoliata is made up of Latin *tri-* (three) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'with three leaves'.

Apparently indian physic had been received from Virginia by the Bishop of London, Henry Compton (1632-1713) by 1690 and by 1713 could be seen growing in several London gardens. But it has never seemed to gain popularity in that Country although initially there was some query as to whether it could be the source of the Brazilian ipecacuanha (*Psychotria ipecacuanha*) as it appeared to have similar although milder properties.

Some North American Indian tribes and early colonists used the root bark like the root of ipecacuanha (*Psychotria ipecacuanha*) particularly for treating indigestion, rheumatism and fluid retention. (Specifically authorities note that the plant offered treatment for sore throats, fever, influenza and diarrhoea for Iroquois Indians, who also used it to cause sweating. It provided a cold cure for both the Iroquois and Cherokee tribes and apart from prescribing it to cause vomiting the Cherokee Indians also used it to treat asthma, kidney and liver disorders, rheumatism and toothache.) It was also used for easing wind and for expelling worms.