

Kalmia angustifolia

[Synonyms : *Chamaedaphne angustifolia*, *Kalmia angustifolia* var. *angustifolia*, *Kalmia intermedia*]

SHEEP'S LAUREL is an evergreen shrub. Native to eastern North America it has many saucer-shaped (occasionally white) scarlet-pink flowers.

It is also known as Calf kill, Dwarf laurel, Evergreen dwarf bush, Goldwithy, Goldworthy, Gouldwithy, Gouldworthy, Hobble bush, Ivy, Kill-kid, Lambkill, Lambkill kalmia, Lamb laurel, Laurel, Laurel poison, Low laurel, Mountain laurel, Narrow-leaved laurel, Narrow-leaved mountain laurel, Pig laurel, Poisonberry, Sheepkill, Sheep poison, Spoonwood ivy, Spurge laurel, and Wicky.

Initially the stamens in these flowers arch backwards so that their ends balance in little pockets on the ends of the petals. Then immediately a flower is touched the stamen is released suddenly and a dusting of pollen floats over both flower and visiting insect.

Warning – some Indian tribes believe a leaf tea can be powerful enough to kill a human being. Certainly the leaves, twigs and flowers are poisonous for grazing animals (even to the point of death) – and birds which have fed on the plant during the Winter are poisonous as well. It should only be used by qualified practitioners.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

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

The common name Spoonwood ivy is a natural progression from the fact that some Indian tribes called it 'spoonwood' as the wood was used to make spoons (as well as tobacco pipes).

While several North American Indian tribes viewed sheep's laurel (or parts of it) as extremely poisonous it did provide a source of medicine for others. Both the Micmac and Malecite tribes applied it to sprains and swellings – and the Penobscot used sheep laurel on cuts. It was a cold cure for some of the Algonkin tribe and for the Montagnais and Abnaki Indians too, and the latter also used it to treat nasal inflammation. While the Montagnais prescribed it for various stomach ailments, some of the Cree tribe chose it to treat bowel disorders and even took it as a tonic.

Certain caterpillars feed on the leaves.

Sheep's laurel is cultivated widely today as an ornamental plant.

Medicinally, it has been noted that the leaves gained a reputation for easing rheumatism – and African slaves in southern North America are said to have made a wash from the plant and applied it to itchy skin (on both man and his dog).