

*Lachnanthes caroliniana*

[Synonyms : *Anonymos tinctoria*, *Dilatrix caroliniana*, *Dilatrix heritiera*, *Dilatrix tinctoria*, *Gyrotheca capitata*, *Gyrotheca tinctoria*, *Heritiera gmeline*, *Heritiera gmelinii*, *Heritiera tinctorum*, *Lachnanthes capitata*, *Lachnanthes caroliniana*, *Lachnanthes carolina*, *Lachnanthes tinctoria*, *Lachnanthes tinctoria* var. *major*]

**LACHNANTHES** is a perennial. Native to the south-eastern United States (from Massachusetts to Florida) and to Cuba, it has woolly, dirty yellow flowers.

It is also known as Bloodwort, Carolina redroot, Dye-root, Dyer's dilatrix, Indian red root, Paint root, Red root, Spiritweed, and Wool flower.

Warning – lachnanthes is possibly a poisonous plant. In large doses when raw it is said to cause irascibility, headaches and vertigo.

*Caroliniana* means 'of or from North or South Carolina (United States)'.

The North American Indians, particularly the Seminole tribe, used the plant in ritual ceremonies. Its dried and powdered root was also a horse tonic for the Catawba Indians. Among the Cherokee it was recognised as a human medicine that was taken internally to treat period problems, bowel disorders, internal bleeding and venereal disease – and applied externally in remedies on skin cancers, piles and some oral disorders.

The plant was not found wanting in attention in the southern United States and Cuba. There in its natural habitat it was believed that the plant was harmless for black pigs and fatally poisonous for white ones. This was even referred to by the celebrated English naturalist, Charles Darwin (1809-1892), after he learnt of observations made by one, Professor I.J. Wyman. Professor Wyman had noted that all pigs in an area of Virginia that was home to lachnanthes were black. He discovered that litters were reared on the plant and that the farmers had found that, while the black pigs were unaffected, the bones of the white ones turned pink and their hoofs fell out. So white pigs in a litter were always killed as they could never be brought to maturity. (Subsequently it was shown that certain plants that harm white sheep and pigs would have no effect on their pigmented brethren.)

The root is the source of a red dye.

Lachnanthes was introduced to England in 1812 where it was grown as a hothouse plant.

Medicinally, the root was used in the treatment of some nervous disorders, rheumatic conditions, pneumonia and typhoid fevers. It is used today in homoeopathic treatments.