

Nymphaea odorata

[Synonyms : *Castalia lekophylla*, *Castalia minor*, *Castalia odorata*, *Castalia pudica*, *Castalia reniformis*, *Nymphaea alba*, *Nymphaea minor*, *Nymphaea odorata* var. *minor*]

AMERICAN WHITE POND LILY is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to eastern North America it has large fragrant, white or pink flowers with many golden stamens.

It is also known as Alligator bonnet, American white water lily, Bonnets, Cow cabbage, Fragrant water lily, Large white water lily, Pond lily, Star lotus, Sweet-scented pond lily, Sweet pond lily, Sweet-scented water lily, Sweet-scented white water lily, Sweet water lily, Toad lily, Water cabbage, Water lily, Water nymph, White pond lily, and White water lily.

Flowers open at sunrise and close during the midday heat and at night – before wilting after several days.

Warning – American white pond lily must not be confused with the potentially poisonous American tuberous water lily (*Nymphaea odorata* subsp. *tuberosa*).

These flowers are more fragrant than those of the white water lily (*Nymphaea alba*).

Odorata is derived from Latin *odor* (scent, smell, odour) meaning ‘scented or fragrant’.

Some of the North American Chippewa Indians ate the unopened flower buds.

One or two North American Indian tribes, including the Potawatomi, turned to the plant for medicine. It was a Chippewa remedy for oral sores, and the Micmac tribe prescribed it for colds, coughs and influenza. Some of the Chippewa Indians used it to treat tuberculosis, and the Okanagan-Colville Indians were known to have relied upon it for easing toothache. Both the Penobscot and Micmac tribes applied it to swellings.

American white pond lily was introduced to Britain in 1786.

Muskrats are partial to the underground stems that are buried in the mud, as are moose which also enjoy the leaves and stems. The seeds are eaten by ducks.

Medicinally, herbalists recommended the root for internal treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery, and used it externally for leucorrhoea. The leaves and roots were applied in poultices on boils, ulcers, inflammation and tumours, and an infusion of them was used as a gargle for oral ulcers and soreness. It is also said to have anaphrodisiac qualities similar to those of its close relatives. Today it can still be used to treat diarrhoea and leucorrhoea (and as a gargle), and can also be found as an ingredient in poultices applied to boils.