

*Oenanthe crocata*

[Synonyms : *Oenanthe cicutae facie lobelij*]

**HEMLOCK WATER DROPWORT** is a perennial. Native to parts of Europe (including Britain) it has tiny wine-scented, white flowers.

It is also known as Beldrum, Bendock, Bilders, *Cegid y Dŵr* (Welsh), *Chue* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Cowbane, Deadman's creesh, Dead men's fingers, Dead tongue, Eltrot, European water hemlock, Five-fingered rat, Five-fingered root, Hemlock dropwort, Horsebane, *Oenanthe safranée* (French), *Painfaie* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Pensacre* (French), Water dropwort, Water hemlock, Water lovage, Water sapwort, Wild rue, and Yellow water dropwort.

Warning – the whole of hemlock water dropwort is extremely poisonous both for man and beast, especially the roots which are often exposed by the shallow running water in which they can be found growing and appear to be exceptionally virulent in Winter. The plant can cause dilated pupils, salivation, vomiting, violent convulsions and death within 3 hours. Roots and stems contain a juice that is yellowish upon exposure to air and can stain the skin yellow. Horses, cattle, sheep and pigs have all died from eating the roots.

Hemlock water dropwort's leaves have a similar appearance to those of wild celery (*Apium graveolens*) or wild angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) The poisonous roots of hemlock water dropwort can be confused with those of the non-poisonous American sweet cicely (*Osmorhiza longistylis*), horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*), turnip (*Brassica rapa*), garden radish (*Raphanus sativus*) and parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), and also the poisonous roots of monk's-hood (*Aconitum napellus*), of fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*), of beaver poison (*Cicuta maculata*), of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), of pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) and of white bryony (*Bryonia dioica*).

*Crocata* is derived from Greek *crocoto*- (saffron-coloured, yellow) component.

The roots have been used as poison for moles and rats, and in Sardinia they have been crushed and used to stun fish.

Both students in Scotland and foreign students in southern England in the late 1970s confused hemlock water dropwort with other plants with disastrous results. Both groups gathered it and added it to evening stews only to be rushed to hospital with an onset of convulsions.

In veterinary medicine in some country areas the boiled plant was once used as a poultice ingredient for treating galls on horses' backs.

Medicinally, in the past herbalists have used the plant to treat epilepsy and some skin diseases.