

Oplopanax horridus

[Synonyms : *Aralia erinacea*, *Echinopanax horridum*, *Fatsia horrida*, *Panax horridum*]

DEVIL'S CLUB is a deciduous shrub. Native to north-western North America it has many small greenish-white flowers.

Warning – some people believe that this plant is poisonous. This has not been proved as yet, beyond the damage caused by the prickles. These are vicious and can give unpleasant wounds that can swell.

Horridus is Latin (rough, shaggy, bristly) meaning 'very prickly, bristly or rough'.

North American Oweekeno Indians boiled the young buds for a vegetable.

The shrub provided a deodorant for the Green River Group Indians, and the Oweekeno used it to treat head lice. For the Thompson tribe it was both a slimming aid and an appetite enhancer.

Devil's club seems to have been beset with superstition and it played an extensive role in the ceremonial of several North American tribes. Hanaksiala and Haisla Indians used the bark in rituals that were meant to ensure luck in an undertaking. For the Kwakiutl tribe the stem held protective properties.

Inner bark was chewed as part of the purification rites performed by the Hanaksiala, Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan and Haisla hunters. Records also show that on perhaps a more practical level Kitasoo hunters bathed in an infusion or decoction of the plant to mask their human smell.

The shrub's charcoal on the faces of Nitinaht ceremonial dancers was not only supposed to give the wearer protection but also to bestow such power that eye contact between them and any onlookers was impossible – and this gift of power was believed in by Tsimshian Indians too. Some of the Lummi Indians used the stems to make a brown face paint while others in the tribe, like the Haisla warriors, used the plant to obtain a black face paint. Spiritual leaders in the Haisla tribe also used the black paint on the faces of those who they wished to protect from enemy spirits.

Fishermen in the Makah, Klallam, Nitinaht, and Hesquiat tribes made fishing lures out of pieces of the lightweight peeled stem.

From records despite the fact that many Indian tribes appreciated its poisonous qualities the shrub seems to have been a highly respected source of medicine for many North American Indians, including the Makah, Nitinaht, Quileute, Hoh and Oweekeno. It was used as a purgative by the Bella Coola, Gitksan and some of the Carrier tribe, and the Kwakiutl, Hanaksiala, Thompson and Haisla Indians all authorities note took it as a laxative. The Lummi, some of the Carrier and the Skagit Indians turned to it to treat some female problems, and the Gitksan used it for venereal disease. The shrub was a remedy for stomach upsets among the Kwakiutl, some of the Carrier, the Thompson, Gitksan and some of the Okanagan-Colville tribes – and the Gitksan also prescribed it for fluid retention. Colds were treated with it by the Haisla, Gitksan, Oweekeno, Sanpoil, Hanaksiala, Cowlitz and Wet'suwet'en Indians. The Green River Group, the Okanagan-Colville, Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan and Haisla tribes all chose it for treating coughs. It was used for influenza by Haisla, Thompson, Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan tribes, and (omitting the Thompson Indians) they and the Skagit, Okanagan-Colville and Kwakiutl tribes all

relied upon it for tuberculosis. The Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan and Haisla Indians prescribed it for bronchitis. Among the Kwakiutl, Oweekeno, Carrier and some of the Salish Indians it was a pain cure, and the Crow and Cheyenne both turned to it for easing headaches. The Gitksan used it for internal bleeding, and the Haisla, Hanaksiala and Bella Coola tribes all took it to cause vomiting. It was part of treatment used for diabetes by the Wet'suwet'en, Haisla, Gitksan and Thompson Indians – and (again except for the Thompson tribe) they used it in addition to treat cancer. Some of the Okanagan-Colville tribe and the Thompson Indians both took it for treating various blood disorders, and the shrub was taken by the Nitinaht and Gitksan Indians as part of the treatment for mending broken bones. Haisla and Hanaksiala tribes used it to treat some eye problems such as cataract, it was put on sores by the Tlingit, the Gitksan applied it to boils and skin ulcers, and the Hanaksiala, Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan and Haisla all applied it to wounds. Many tribes including the Wet'suwet'en, Nitinaht, some of the Salish, the Gitksan, Haisla, Bella Coola, Cowlitz, Oweekeno, Makah and Hanaksiala used devil's club to ease rheumatism, and the Oweekeno, Haisla, some of the Okanagan-Colville, the Thompson, Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan all took it as a tonic.

Devil's club has often been one of the nightmares for frontiersmen, loggers and hunters alike as it contributes significantly to impenetrable undergrowth.