

Sagittaria latifolia

[Synonyms : *Sagitta latifolia*, *Sagittaria chinensis*, *Sagittaria engelmanniana* subsp. *longirostra*, *Sagittaria esculenta*, *Sagittaria gracilis*, *Sagittaria hastata*, *Sagittaria latifolia* var. *glabra*, *Sagittaria latifolia* var. *major*, *Sagittaria latifolia* var. *obtusata*, *Sagittaria latifolia* var. *pubescens*, *Sagittaria longirostra*, *Sagittaria obtusata*, *Sagittaria ornithorhyncha*, *Sagittaria planipes*, *Sagittaria pubescens*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *gracilis*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *hastata*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *latifolia*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *macrophylla*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *pubescens*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *variabilis*, *Sagittaria sagittifolia* var. *vulgaris*, *Sagittaria simplex*, *Sagittaria variabilis*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *angustifolia*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *diversifolia*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *latifolia*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *obtusata*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *pubescens*, *Sagittaria variabilis* var. *sagittifolia*, *Sagittaria viscosa*]

WAPATO is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to North America it has green- or yellow-centred white flowers.

It is also known as American arrowhead, Arrowhead, Arrowleaf, *Bredpilblad* (Swedish), *Breitblättriges Pfeilkraut* (German), Broadleaf arrowhead, Broad-leaved arrowhead, Bull tongue, Chinese onion, Common arrowhead, Duck potato, Katniss, *Kirit* (Pawnee North American Indian), Muskrat-potato, *Pshitola* (Dakota North American Indian), *Si* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), *Šípátka šírolistá* (Czech), *Si-poro* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Swamp potato, Swan-potato, Swan root, Tule potato, Wappata, Water-archer, Water-lily, and Waxflower.

[Some authorities believe that this species is one and the same as arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*).]

Latifolia means ‘broad leaved’.

Many of the North American Indian tribes, not least the Pomo, Dakota, Klamath, Meskwaki, Thompson, Potawatomi, Cocopa, Winnebago, Chippewa, Omaha and Pawnee (and later immigrant Californian Chinese) enjoyed eating the tuberous roots boiled or roasted, as well as the starchy leaf stems. Both the Potawatomi and Meskwaki tribes also stored boiled tubers to eat in Winter.

They knew that this pleasure was shared with ducks (hence one of its common names), geese and musk-rats. According to some authorities the Indians (records mention the Meskwaki) were even known to raid musk-rats’ carefully hoarded caches – and the Potawatomi are also said to have profited from this knowledge as they planted wapato to attract the game birds for their hunters.

Iroquois Indians used a root decoction to fertilize corn (*Zea*) as it was planted – and the tubers were used as dice by the Cocopa in gambling games.

The plant was also a source of medicine for a few North American tribes including some of the Dakota and the Chippewa. It was an ingredient in a laxative taken by the Iroquois, and the Chippewa prescribed a root infusion for indigestion. Cherokee babies suffering from fever were treated with it, the Iroquois also used it for easing rheumatism, and it was applied to skin disorders by both the Potawatomi and Iroquois tribes (especially on children of the latter).

Today the tubers are still eaten in America like potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*). In Asia wapato has long been cultivated on the edges of paddy fields and eaten like arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*).