

Sanguinaria canadensis

[Synonyms : *Sanguinaria australis*, *Sanguinaria canadensis* var. *rotundifolia*, *Sanguinaria dilleniana*]

BLOODROOT is a perennial. Native to north-eastern North America it has small white (occasionally pinkish) flowers with golden stamens.

It is also known as Boloroot, Coon root, Cornroot, Indian paint, Indian plant, Indian red paint, *Kanadische Blutwurzel* (German), Large-leaved blood-wort, Large-leaved sandwort, *Minigathe maka wau* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Panson, Pauson, *Peh-hishuji* (Winnebago North American Indian), Puccoon, Puccoon-root, Red Indian paint, Red paint root, Red puccoon, Red root, Sanguinaria, Snakebite, Sweet slumber, Tetterwort, Tumeric, Tumerick, Turmeric, and White puccoon.

The short-lived flower opens in full sunlight and closes at night.

Warning – the plant is poisonous and can only be used by qualified practitioners. A moderate or large dose (a therapeutic amount would be small) can cause violent vomiting, irregular heartbeat, disturbed vision, burning stomach pain, intense thirst, dizziness, faintness, vertigo, paralysis, collapse and death. Dried underground stem can cause nasal irritation and sneezing. Plant juice can irritate the skin.

Canadensis means ‘of or from Canada or north-eastern North America’.

Juice from bloodroot was one of the dyes used by the North American ‘Red’ Indians’, including the Cherokee, Chippewa, Ponca, Omaha, Delaware, Meskwaki, Algonkin, Winnebago, Menominee, and Potawatomi tribes. It not only served as the red ‘war paint’ associated so often today with the North American Indians but this was also used for dyeing cloth, and colouring weapons and baskets – and it was also used by the Menominee women for staining their matting. [Many authorities believe that it was the Caribbean Indian use of the dye obtained from annatto (*Bixa orellana*) or alternatively the North American Indian use of chestnut oak (*Quercus prinus*) that led to the term ‘Red Indian’.] Both the Chippewa and Iroquois tribes obtained red and yellow dyes as well as various shades of these. In time both American and French dyers also came to use the root to dye material an orange-red colour.

For the Ponca and Algonkin Indians bloodroot was a love charm – and the Penobscot tribe wore dried root necklaces to prevent bleeding. It was an aphrodisiac for the Micmac, and the Abnaki tribe used it in a veterinary capacity on their horses.

The plant also provided medicines for many North American Indian tribes including the Chippewa. The root was used in treatments for rattlesnake bites and for tumours and other growths (the latter has been borne in mind in modern research for plants with anti-cancerous properties). Some North American Indians such as the Potawatomi and some of the Chippewa squeezed the juice of the root onto maple sugar (*Acer*) as a remedy for sore throats – while others including the Iroquois and Micmac tribes simply eased a bad throat by chewing the plant (or taking a root infusion). Some of the Chippewa tribe valued it as a stimulant, and they and the Iroquois also used it as a laxative. Both the Menominee and Meskwaki Indians added it to various medicines in the belief that it enhanced the properties of the other ingredients. Bloodroot was used by Mohican and Iroquois Indians to cause vomiting, and they and some of the Chippewa, some of the

Algonkin and the Delaware tribe all took it as a tonic. The Menominee, Micmac, Iroquois, and Abnaki tribes prescribed it for treating period problems, and Iroquois Indians used it to ease pain. Records would indicate that the latter seem to have placed more faith in the plant than any other tribe as, apart from the uses they shared in common with others they also used the plant to treat fever, diarrhoea, kidney and liver problems, asthma, nasal ailments, indigestion, earache, sore eyes, worms and poison ivy symptoms. Delaware, Chippewa and Iroquois Indians eased stomach upsets with the plant – and the Iroquois and some of the Delaware also used it to counter vomiting. Blood disorders were treated with it by some of the Chippewa, the Iroquois, Mohican and some of the Delaware tribes, and it was taken by Malecite, Micmac and Iroquois Indians to heal internal bleeding. Some of the Algonkin valued the plant for treating heart disorders, some of the Chippewa prescribed it for convulsions and treating rheumatism, and it was an Iroquois and Malecite treatment for piles. Both the Iroquois and some of the Chippewa tribe used it in treatments for venereal disease, and Iroquois and Cherokee tribes applied it to skin problems. Some of the Chippewa and the Malecite, Micmac and Iroquois tribes used bloodroot to heal wounds, and the Meskwaki Indians applied it to burns. Both the Cherokee and Iroquois tribes used the plant for treating lung problems in general and coughs, the Micmac and Iroquois valued it for easing colds, it was a Potawatomi remedy for diphtheria, and Malecite, Iroquois and Micmac Indians all relied upon it as a treatment for tuberculosis. It is said that the early North American settlers also used the root in cough medicines.

The red juice has been employed as an insect repellent.

Herbalists used it for treating typhoid, scarlatina, pneumonia, jaundice, indigestion, catarrh and ringworm. In 1830 bloodroot's medicinal effect was being compared with that of foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) and in the 20th Century between World Wars I and II, ipecacuanha (*Psychotria ipecacuanha*) and today bloodroot is used by the pharmaceutical industry in some proprietary medicines. One interesting modern use comes from the possible pain relief the plant can bring to sensitive teeth and an extract has been included as an ingredient in tooth cleaning powders or pastes.