

Symphoricarpos albus

[Synonyms : *Lonicera alba*, *Lonicera symphoricarpos*, *Symphoricarpos albus* var. *albus*, *Symphoricarpos pauciflorus*, *Symphoricarpos racemosus*, *Symphoricarpos rivularis*, *Vaccinium album*, *Xylosteon album*]

SNOWBERRY is a deciduous shrub. Native to eastern North America it has tiny pinkish-white flowers.

It is also known as Common snowberry, *Gewöhnliche Schneebeere* (German), *Imelovník biely* (Slovak), *Knackbeere* (German), *Knallerbse* (German), Lardy balls, *Llus Eira* (Welsh), *Lumimarjapensas* (Finnish), *Pámelník bílý* (Czech), *Pámelník hroznatý* (Czech), *Pámelník poříční* (Czech), *Schneebeere* (German), *Sneeuwbes* (Dutch), and Waxberry.

Warning – snowberry can cause drowsiness, mild dizziness, vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration, delirium and semi-coma. The berry juice can cause dermatitis.

The plant provides nectar for bees which in turn produces honey.

Alba means ‘white’.

The fruit offer Winter food for birds especially game-birds such as grouse.

Although some North American Indian tribes such as the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville believed that the berries were extremely poisonous –the Squaxin ate them dried.

The wood was used by the Paiute tribe to make babies’ cradles (which in the Nez Perce tribe would have been looped with snowberry branches to protect the infants from ghosts). The Okanagan-Colville Indians made brooms by tying together bundles of branches and the smoke from green twigs was used by the Blackfoot to blacken newly-made tobacco pipes.

Thompson Indian babies were washed with a soap consisting of a mild wood decoction.

In the Makah tribe it was accepted that witchcraft could be deflected if one chewed and swallowed the leaves.

Snowberry also played a ceremonial role for the Cheyenne as it was used to make the Sun Dance altar.

The shrub was used in games by several Indian tribes. Paiute Indians marked sticks of it for a dice game, and during a Nitinaht game the berries were rubbed on the face.

It was a source of medicine for quite a few North American Indian tribes – and was also used by Crow Indians in veterinary medicine for their horses. In human medicine it was used by both the Nez Perce tribe and some of the Cree to treat fever (and the former prescribed it for both adults and children). Skagit Indians used it to treat tuberculosis and as a general poison antidote, and the Thompson tribe turned to it as a remedy for some female problems and for diarrhoea. It was used for period disorders by the Kutenai, and the Sanpoil, Nitinaht, some of the Dakota and the Chippewa Indians all used it to treat fluid retention. Stomach upsets were eased with it by both the Miwok and Thompson tribes, and the Miwok and Klallam Indians used it for easing colds. The shrub provided a laxative for both the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville Indians, and some of the Cree tribe and the Chehalis Indians as well used it for venereal diseases. Records suggest that it was a popular drug for treating eye problems as it was used for this by the Okanagan-Colville, some of the Dakota, some of the Cree, the Wet’suwet’en, Sanpoil, Flathead, Thompson and Kwakiutl tribes. Snowberry seems to have been used widely for treating

skin disorders as records note it could be chosen by the Green River Group, the Hesquiat, Saanich, Cowichan, Okanagan-Colville, some of the Cree, the Sanpoil, Thompson and Flathead Indians. Chehalis Indians applied it to wounds and the Saanich, Cowichan and Flathead all used it to heal burns.

It is believed that snowberry was introduced to Britain from North America in 1817.