**BLUE COHOSH**

*Caulophyllum thalictroides*  
[kaw-loh-FIL-um thal-ik-TROY-deez]

**Family:** Berberidaceae

**Names:** blue berry, blueberry cohosh, blueberry root, blue ginseng, papoose root, squawroot, yellow ginseng;

**Description:** Erect plant with tall blue flower stem. It has a height of up to 3 feet and a width of 1 ½ feet. The flowers are 5 petaled, yellow-green, on the top of tall stalks. The leaves are thin, bluish green, oval shape with lobes from 1-4 inches long. The fruit is blue-black and 1/3 inch in diameter. The rhizome is knotty, branched, brownish gray with white inside. They taste bitter and acrid. It blooms from June to August and is native to the Eastern United States and Canada, in moist deep woodlands under hardwood trees in higher mountain elevations.

**Cultivation:** It is a perennial to zone 3. Propagation by seed stratified for 4 weeks and germination is within 2-4 weeks. It can also be propagated by root division. The seeds can be planted in midsummer as soon as the blueberrylike fruits ripen. Space 1 ½ to 2 feet apart in fairly rich, moist soil with a pH of 4.5-7. Prefers filtered shade (up to 75%) and humidity. Plants grown from seed will have to be in the ground for up to five years before the root can be harvested. Harvest the rhizomes in late fall.

**History:** The name Cohosh is an Algonquin name and was given to both blue and black because of their similarity in looks (roots) and actions. Blue refers to the bluish stem and berries. The name *Caulophyllum* describes the leaf habit. The root was widely used among native American women 2-3 weeks in advance to promote easy labor. Before the wide use of forceps, it was also used by American doctors, especially when birth was delayed due to weakness or fatigue. Blue cohosh was a main ingredient in the popular “Mother’s Cordial” officially known a Syrup of Mitchella.

**Constituents:** Alkaloids (methylcytistine, laburnine, anagyrine, baptifoline, magniflorine, caulophylline), saponins (caulosaponins), soluble resin, gum, starch, salts, phosphoric acid,

**Properties:** tonic, antispasmodic, anti-inflammatory, uterine stimulant, diuretic, antirheumatic, emmenagogue, diaphoretic, anthelmintic

**Energetics:** acrid, bitter, warm, mildly toxic

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver

**Medical Uses:** The Eclectic doctors used blue cohosh to reduce labor pains, painful menstruation, stomach cramps, as an abortifacient and for joints stiff from arthritis or rheumatism. Herbalists also use it to help with irregular menstruation or a weak uterus.
Researchers in India have discovered evidence that the American Indians may have been correct in using blue cohosh as a contraceptive. In animals, the herb inhibits ovulation. There has been some comparison to goldenseal in its effect and it has been used as an effective control for chronic yeast infections. The bitter principles in blue cohosh (notably methylcytistine) constrict peripheral blood vessels, stimulates the small intestine and respiration and produces hyperglycemia in a manner similar to nicotine but only about one-fortieth as toxic. They are also antifungal. It is a relatively complicated herb to use. It appears that the dose required for balancing the menstrual cycle changes throughout the cycle. If too much is taken intestinal cramping and headaches often occur. It can either stimulate a uterus to contract or inhibit contractions. It is used for amenorrhea in women whose cycles are blocked by physical congestion or nervous or hormonal imbalance. It is used in early pregnancy to prevent miscarriages, though for this use it is usually taken in small doses combined with other antispasmodics such as cramp bark. Its other important use is as a hormonal and tissue toner. Blue cohosh is given along with uterine astringent tonics for tears or surgical damage to the reproductive system during, but especially after, chronic reproductive infections; it also helps shrink fibroids or growths and promotes fertility. Tinctures are more effective than water-based tea since the active ingredients are not fully water soluble.

Equal parts of blue and black cohosh tincture can be mixed and 40-60 drops of tincture given every hour until contractions are even and strong. Two parts blue cohosh to one part spikenard is used by some midwives when the cervix is one-half dilated and labor is slow or has stopped. Given after birth, it can help deliver a retained placenta and stop bleeding because it helps the uterus to clamp down without casing the cervix to close down. It is also a good herb for easing afterpains. Some midwives recommend that women use blue cohosh tincture, once a day, starting 2-3 weeks before their delivery date to give the uterus some final toning helping labor be smoother and less painful.

**REMEDIES:** Decoction is prescribed to relieve menstrual pain and to treat arthritis

Tincture: given during labor to relieve the pain of childbirth and to speed delivery.

Other than in pregnancy, the adult dose is 1-2 teaspoons per cup of water, 1 cup three times a day. In tincture form dose is 1 teaspoon in water, three times a day.

**COMBINATION for reducing spotting and flooding during premenopause:** In extract format combine 4 oz shepherd’s purse herb (made from fresh plant), 3 oz lady’s mantle herb, 2 oz yellow dock root and 1 oz blue cohosh root. Take 1 teaspoon in 1 cup water in the morning and evening. Take an extra dropperful every ten minutes until excess bleeding slows or stops.

**Toxicity:** The powdered herb is a strong irritant to mucous membranes, so avoid inhaling it. Taken internally, blue cohosh can increase high blood pressure. The berries are poisonous. It is contraindicated in pregnancy except when its use is supervised by experienced herbalists or midwives.

**References:**


**Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)

Crimson Sage, [http://www.crimson-sage.com](http://www.crimson-sage.com)