

# *Caulophyllum thalictroides* (L.) Michx.

**Standardized Common Name:** Blue Cohosh

**Other Common Names:** Blueberry Root, Papoose Root, Squaw Root

**Family:** Berberidaceae

**Taxonomy:** According to most treatments, there is one species of *Caulophyllum* in North America (*C. thalictroides*) and one in Asia. *Caulophyllum thalictroides* var. *giganteum* Farw., a variety of *C. thalictroides* that has on average larger leaves, fewer and larger flowers, and putatively a later flowering time, is raised to the rank of species as *C. giganteum* (Farw.) Loconte & W. H. Blackwell in a recent treatment. The two “species” are found together over most of their range, often in mixed populations, and the evidence for their separation is minimal.

**Description:** Rhizomatous perennial herb. Rhizome crooked, branching, to 15 cm long, with numerous long, slender roots. Stem erect, 30–70 cm high, bearing (1–)2 leaves and a terminal inflorescence, rarely branching. First leaf (2–)3–4-ternately compound, the primary rachises long; leaflets 27 or sometimes more, 3–8(–10) cm long, broadly obovate, usually 2–3-lobed, deep green, glaucous; leaflet bases rounded to wedge-shaped, often somewhat oblique; leaflet and lobe apices acute. Inflorescence cymose, racemiform or paniculiform, usually subtended by a smaller 2-ternately or ternate-pinnately compound second leaf, with (5–)12–20(–70) flowers. Flowers yellowish-green or maroon-tinged, 3–7 mm in diameter, with 6 petaloid sepals, 6 small thickened petals, 6 stamens, 1 carpel. Mature “fruit” consisting of naked seeds with fleshy outer layer, appearing berry-like, deep blue, globose, 6–8 mm in diameter, ripening on flower stalk after remains of ovary have fallen away.

**Parts in Commerce:** Rhizome with roots

## Identification:

- Rhizome crooked, knotted, branching, (7–)10–15 (–25) cm long
- 0.5–1.5 cm thick, somewhat flattened
- Surrounded by dense mat of thin unbranched roots, up to 20 cm long, emerging from most surfaces of rhizome
- Upper surface of rhizome bearing several large, shallow cup-shaped stem scars, either depressed or raised, and often remnants of stem bases
- Outside of rhizome and roots usually a distinctly yellowish pale brown; though overall form of rhizome is knotted, portions of surface not covered with roots often look smooth

- Inside of rhizome yellowish to pale brown, having a waxy appearance
- In cross-section, contains thin bark and cortex; xylem in numerous narrow wedges separated by narrow parenchyma rays; large pith
- Roots in cross-section have usually 4-rayed xylem
- Fracture tough
- Taste bitter, acrid

**Adulterants:** *Jeffersonia diphylla* (L.) Pers. is reported in historical literature to be an adulterant, though it could not easily be mistaken for *Caulophyllum*, as its rhizome is significantly smaller. There is at present no reason to exclude material of *C. thalictroides* var. *giganteum* from Blue Cohosh in commerce, and it would probably be impossible to distinguish between rhizomes of different varieties.

## References:

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