



Photo by Steve Kruger

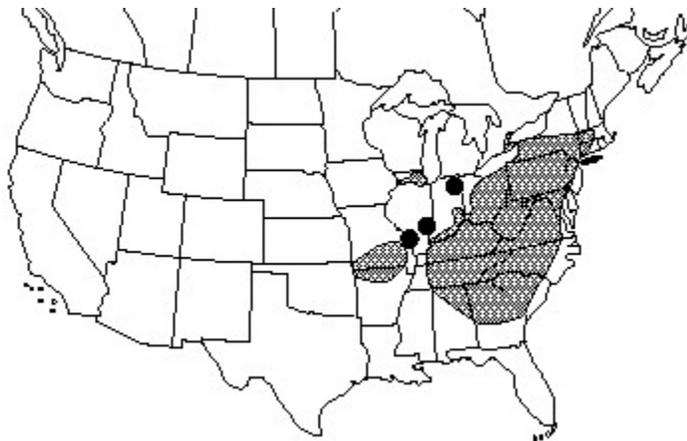
*Actaea racemosa*, sometimes referred to as *Cimifuga racemosa*

**Names:** Black Cohosh, Rattle Weed, Rattle Root, Bugbane, Squawroot

**Description:** Black cohosh is an herbaceous perennial with serrated, pinnately compound leaves with terminal three-lobed leaflets. Depending on growing conditions it can be between 3 and 8 feet tall and produces long stalks with small white flowers. These turn into seed pods that dry out in late summer and early fall. The rattling of the seeds inside led to the names rattleweed and rattleroot. The horizontal rhizomes and roots are large and black. The rhizomes produce multiple stems, and the plant is often found in large patches.

**Range and Habitat:** Black cohosh is found in a variety of habitats: moist, rich woods (which it shares with other medicinals like goldenseal, ginseng, blue cohosh and bethroot), woodland openings and forest edges.

*Range Map Actaea racemosa*

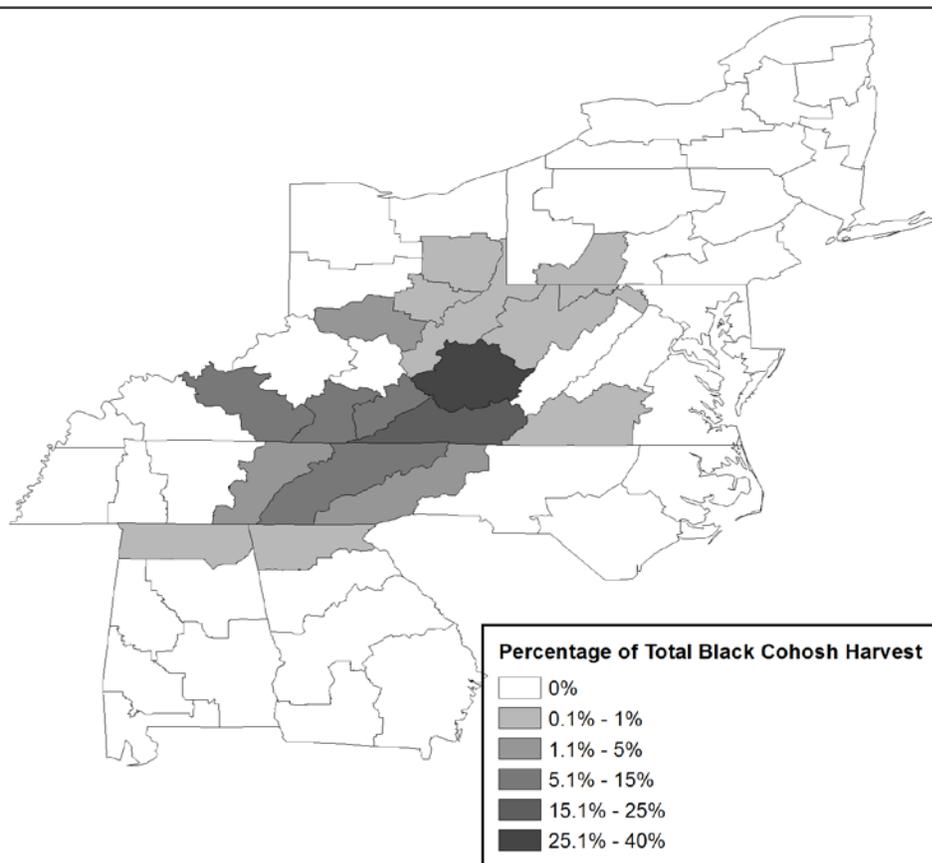


**Uses:** Black cohosh rhizome and root was used by Native Americans and early settlers to cure a variety of maladies, but today it is primarily used to treat symptoms of menopause and to aid childbirth. Consumer demand has risen since the early 2000s due to concerns about the side effects of hormone replacement therapy. Black cohosh is seen as a less dangerous alternative, and has become one of the more mainstream and widely-used herbal medicines.

**Average price paid to harvesters in 2014:** \$3.50 dry \$0.85 fresh

**Trade Volume** 20 percent of our respondents purchased black cohosh, making it the third most commonly bought plant. In 2014 it represented 48 percent of the total weight of all products we surveyed, making it by far the most commonly harvested product by weight. We are still creating our output estimates, but the American Herbal Products Association recorded over 315,000 pounds of black cohosh bought by its members in 2010. The harvest appears to be sensitive to price fluctuations. Dealers who took the RootReport survey in both years reported a drop of 18 percent in purchasing between 2013 and 2014.

**Trade Distribution** The map below shows black cohosh harvest distribution in the eastern US based on last year's survey.



## Stewardship and cultivation

Like all roots, black cohosh should be harvested after it has had a chance to produce seed, which occurs in late summer and early fall. It can sprout from pieces of rhizome or root, but seeds, dispersed by animals, gravity, or the elements are the way new patches are established. Waiting for the plant to produce fruit also makes it more easily distinguishable from other *Actaea* “look-alikes” such as the poisonous Doll’s Eye (*Actaea pachypoda*). As the plant dies back, more energy will be directed to the root system, meaning that the roots will be heavier and more valuable economically and medicinally. Traditionally, black cohosh patches are often flagged and then harvested and sold over the late fall and winter.

Black Cohosh is not difficult to grow. It can be easily propagated from root cuttings into well drained soils under hardwood forest or artificial shade. The main obstacle is the low price point and competition from wild harvested sources. Despite these limitations there is some black cohosh in cultivation in Europe and Canada. Some small growers in the US are getting higher prices for certified organic or forest-grown black cohosh. It is also sold as an ornamental native landscaping plant.

You can find out more about cultivating Black Cohosh on our Resources and References Page.

## References

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