

Rauvolfia serpentina

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Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Plantae
Division:	Magnoliophyta
Class:	Magnoliopsida
Order:	Gentianales
Family:	Apocynaceae
Genus:	<i>Rauvolfia</i>
Species:	<i>R. serpentina</i>

Binomial name

Rauvolfia serpentina
(L.) Benth. ex Kurz

Rauwolfia serpentina, or ' Indian snakeroot' or 'sarpagandha' is a species of flowering plant in the family Apocynaceae. It is native to the Indian Subcontinent and East Asia (from India to Indonesia).^[1]

Medicinal uses

Rauwolfia serpentina contains a number of bioactive chemicals, including yohimbine, reserpine, ajmaline, deserpidine, rescinnamine, serpentinine.

The extract of the plant has also been used for millennia in India – Alexander the Great administered this plant to cure his general Ptolemy I Soter of a poisoned arrow. It was reported that Mahatma Gandhi took it as a tranquilizer during his lifetime.^[2] It has been used for millennia to treat insect stings and the bites of venomous reptiles. A compound which it contains called reserpine, was used in an attempt to treat high blood pressure and mental disorders including schizophrenia, and had a brief period of popularity for that purpose in the West from 1954 to 1957.

According to the American Cancer Society: "Available scientific evidence does not support claims that Indian snakeroot is effective in treating cancer, liver disease, or mental illness. It also has many dangerous side effects and is likely to increase the risk of cancer."

It is one of the 50 fundamental herbs used in traditional Chinese medicine, where it has the name *shégēn mù* (Chinese: 蛇根木) or *yìndù shémù* (Chinese: 印度蛇木).

Etymology

The wood, commonly known as serpentwood, is mildly popular amongst woodcarving and woodturning hobbyists.^[citation needed]

References

- [1] Oudhia, P. and Tripathi, R.S. (2002). Identification, cultivation and export of important medicinal plants. In Proc. National Seminar on Horticulture Development in Chhattisgarh: Vision and Vistas. Indira Gandhi Agricultural University, Raipur (India) 21-23 Jan. 2002:78-85.
- [2] Pills for Mental Illness? (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,857672,00.html>), *TIME Magazine*, November 8, 1954



Sarpagandha plant at Talkatora Gardens, Delhi

Article Sources and Contributors

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