

# Going native goldenseal charm an heal

## Opinion

“Golden” will be the first word to enter your mind when you see the roots, rhizomes and dormant buds of *Hydrastis canadensis* (Figure 1). You’ll understand immediately why the common name is “Goldenseal” (Figure 2). This very useful native woodland plant will not only charm and entertain you spring, summer, and autumn, it can even heal you.

Well, I’d better be careful not to play doctor here, though many Native American tribes were aware of the powerful medicinal benefits of Goldenseal quite a long time ago. The Cherokee used it as a cancer remedy, which is one of the earliest observations of the occurrence and treatment of cancer among American Indian groups. Another important historical use of Goldenseal root was as an eye wash for various eye problems, such as conjunctivitis. The Iroquois found it beneficial as a bitter stomach digestive to help stimulate digestion and improve appetite, and to treat skin inflammations. Other uses include relief for inflammation of the mucous membranes of the throat.

I will say that I’ve used it successfully to ease the pain and hasten the healing of sore throats and to treat cold and influenza symptoms. I made a tea from dried roots and have to admit that it was one of the most bitter tastes I’ve ever experienced. However, the results were well worth it and it was more palatable than taking overprescribed, and most likely ineffective, antibiotics.

*Hydrastis canadensis* is native to almost every state east of the Mississippi and will grow happily in just about any soil conditions. I would guess that hardiness and heat tolerance are USDA zones 4-10. I grow *Hydrastis canadensis* in several places in my gardens, from full shade to dappled sunlight. It makes a wonderful groundcover as the 6-12” leaves on 6-12” plants overlap and shade out weeds.

You can go to: [www.sunfarm.com/hydrastis\\_canadensis.phtml](http://www.sunfarm.com/hydrastis_canadensis.phtml) for some evolutionary, seasonal images of *Hydrastis canadensis* from early spring to late autumn, emergence, and flower to fruit.

Here’s a beautiful hand-colored botanical illustration from days past, showing all seasons and parts of the plant. The large, medium-green, deeply textured oak/maple-shaped leaves stay rich and supple all the growing season long and make a perfect foil for their frilly white, ephemeral flowers in early spring and their bright-red, raspberry like fruit in autumn.

This long-lived native perennial is very easy to grow from seed and, left to its own devices, will make a lovely colony in just a few years. Once established, it requires no maintenance other than normal weeding and a good mulch. Plants never “need” to be divided, but if you desire to make new divisions, you can dig them up every four or five years and make your divisions in early spring. This will give them ample time to re-establish themselves before winter.

As with all of the other members of the Ranunculaceae family, the voluminous herds of deer that traverse my farm daily have NEVER touched this graceful plant. All in all, *Hydrastis canadensis* is a welcome addition in any garden. O Barry Glick, the self-proclaimed

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“King of Helleborus,” grew up in Philadelphia in the ’60s, a Mecca of horticulture. Barry cut high school classes and hitchhiked to Longwood Gardens before he was old enough to drive. In 1972, he realized there was just not enough room for him and his plants in the big-city environment, so he bought 60 acres of a mountaintop in Greenbrier County, WV, where he gave birth to Sunshine Farm & Gardens ([www.sunfarm.com](http://www.sunfarm.com)), a mail-order plant nursery.

Barry grows more than 10,000 different plants and specializes in native plants and hellebores. He can be reached at 304.497.2208 or [barry@sunfarm.com](mailto:barry@sunfarm.com).



Figure 1 *Hydrastis canadensis*.



Figure 2 Goldenseal.

## Acknowledgements

None.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.