

# *Aconitum balfourii*

No Image

**Family:** Ranunculacae

**Local/common names:** Meetha vish, Vatsanabh, Vatsanabha, Meetha Vish (Uttaranchal)

**Trade name:** Mitha jahar

**Profile:**

*A. balfourii* is valued for its tuberous roots, which contain a medicinally important crystalline toxic alkaloid called pseudoaconitine. Due to unsustainable harvest from the wild for trade and other purposes, the species has become endangered in the Western and Central Himalayas. The plant is commonly used as a substitute for *Aconitum ferox*.

**Habitat and ecology:** *Aconitum balfourii* is distributed in the Himalayas at an altitude of 2800-4200 m with major populations growing in the Central Himalayas. The plant is found in the Valley of Flowers, Kedarnath, Tunganath, Madhyamaheshwar, Har ki Dun and Panwalikatha in the Garhwal Himalayas. In the eastern Himalayas it is found from Nepal to Tibet at an elevation of 2200-4000 m.

**Morphology:** The plant is a perennial herb bearing tuberous roots. The buds are broad, obtuse cones or hemispheres with broad scales with a collapsing base, which usually decays after sprouting. The stem is erect, robust and 1-1.5 m high with many branches. The leaves are scattered, orbicular or ovate to cordate. The inflorescence is straight, racemose, narrow with many yellowish-tomentellous coloured flowers. The flowers have five carpels with 16-25 trigonous seeds. The sepals are blue, pubescent and helmet-shaped.

**Distinguishing features:** The plant is a perennial herb bearing tuberous roots and scattered leaves. It has an erect many-flowered inflorescence.

**Life cycle:** Seed germination takes place in May-June and flowering takes place in July-September.

**Uses:** The dried tubers are used medicinally as an anti-inflammatory, analgesic, vermifuge, anti-rheumatic, painkiller and in gout/arthritis and inflammations. It is effective in disorders caused by worms and microorganisms and in amnesia, loss of heat, leprosy, and paralysis. The plant is used to cure septics, boils, stomachache, tonsil, gastritis, leprosy, rheumatism, swelling and wounds. The roots are soaked in milk until they become soft to eradicate their cardio-depressant properties. A small quantity of tuber paste is used to develop body resistance in children.

**Market rate:** Dried tuber is sold at a rate of Rs.250/- per kg.