

Aconitum ferox



Family: Ranunculaceae

Local/common names:

Indian Aconite, Monkshood,
Bikh, Bikhma, Vastanabha,
Bachnag, Mithavis

Trade name: Akphale, Bikh
or Bish, Nilo Bish, Nyline

Profile:

Aconitum ferox is a species of the Ranunculaceae family. It is also known as the Indian Aconite. The density of the plant is higher in the stretch from Central Nepal to Bhutan. The whole plant is highly toxic and simple skin contact can cause numbness in some people. The root of this plant is widely collected from the wild for medicinal use and thus the plant is becoming rare in much of its range. The plant is included in the Red Data book of India, indicating its endangered status.

Habitat and ecology: The plants grow well in woodlands, gardens and moderately shaded areas. It grows well in heavy clay soils and prefers a moist calcareous soil in sun or semi-shade. The species is naturally available in the lower alpine region, ranging from 2100-4500 m and is commonly found within the altitudinal range of 3000-3500 m. The plant is generally found in the Himalayas covering the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, West Bengal (Darjeeling), Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of India.

Morphology: It is an erect hardy perennial herb with tuberous roots. The plant is 50-100 cm high with an erect stem. The flowers are bluish purple in colour with a number of stamens. The leaves are scattered, ovate-reniform. The fruit is a capsule, composed of 5 follicles and bears numerous seeds. The roots are dark-brown externally. On tasting, it produces a strong tingling sensation.

Distinguishing features: The leaves are semi-circular and the blue flowers are arranged in loose racemes.

Life cycle: The flowering occurs in August-September.

Uses: The dried root is an alterative, anaesthetic, anti-arthritis, de-obstruent, diaphoretic, diuretic, sedative and stimulant. This is a very poisonous plant and should only be used with extreme caution and under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. It has been used in India and Nepal in the treatment of neuralgia, leprosy, fevers, cholera and rheumatism. When the roots are soaked in cow's urine, they become soft and lose their depressant action on the heart, becoming a stimulant instead. The species is in great demand for the Homeopathy formulations.

Market rate: The dried roots of the plant are marketed at large scale at Rs.150-200/- per kg of roots (2004-2005).