

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)

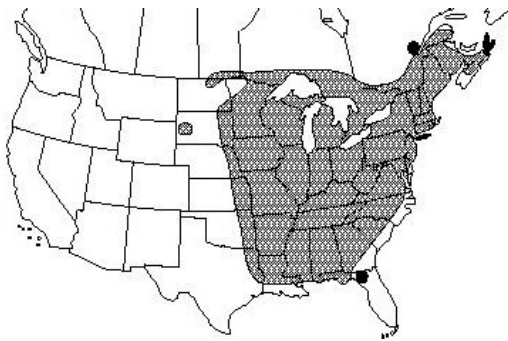


Names: Bloodroot, Redroot, Puccoon.

Description: Bloodroot is one of the earliest flowers to bloom in Spring, putting out a single white waxy flower in March or April. A distinctive leaf with 5 to 9 lobes emerges with the flower and unfurls from the stem. The plant can eventually reach 12 inches in height and often grow in patches. A seedpod forms in the summertime. The seeds have a nutritious coating, and are carried off and primarily dispersed by ants. Its name derives from its red rhizome that “bleeds” when it is broken or cut.



Range and Habitat: Bloodroot is found most commonly in rich, moist hardwood forests. It is found in every eastern state from the East Coast to the Great Plains.



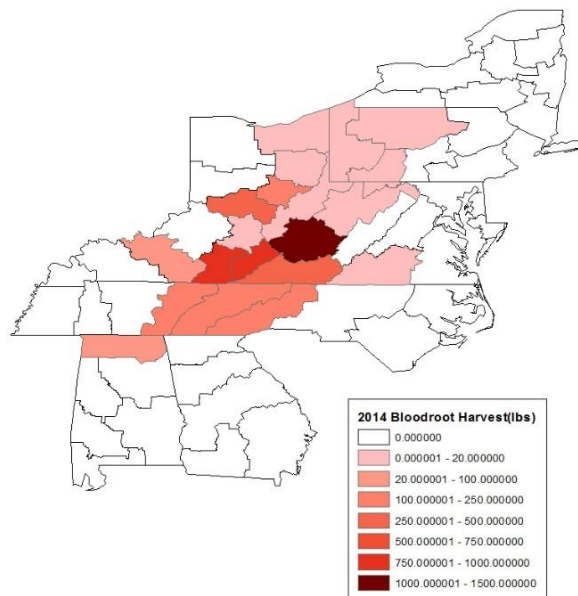
Uses: Bloodroot should never be used without consulting a physician or herbalist as it can be toxic even in small doses. It has anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. It has been used topically and internally to treat bacterial infections, respiratory ailments, ulcers, skin conditions, and cancers, especially skin cancer. Bloodroot was an anti-plaque and anti-gingivitis ingredient in toothpastes and mouthwashes but it has been found to cause precancerous lesions in some users. In the early 2000s demand rose briefly when it was used as an appetite-stimulating additive in animal feed, but more recently other sources of the medicinal compound sanguinarine have been substituted. In addition to medicine, bloodroot has long been used a pesticide, and as a source of red dye used in traditional Native American baskets and textiles.

Average Price Paid to Harvesters in 2014 Dry: \$12.07 Wet: \$2.38

Trade Volume: Bloodroot is one of the “big three,” of eastern woodland medicinal plants. In our survey, 27 percent of all buyers surveyed and 75 percent of ginseng buyers purchasing other products reported buying bloodroot, making it the second most popular species after goldenseal. It’s relatively small root might be the reason it only accounted for 3 percent of total volume. The bloodroot market has fluctuated a great deal over the last few decades. The American Herbal Products Association recorded annual totals from a high of 48,000 pounds in 2000 to a low of less than 4,000 pounds in 2009. One reason for this fall in demand was the substitution of another species for an animal food additive. Recently we have seen bloodroot demand rising again, possibly due to its use in new cancer treatments. We are still working on our estimates for total output, but buyers who bought bloodroot in both survey years reported buying 20 percent more bloodroot in 2014 than they did in 2013.

Trade Distribution:

Bloodroot was bought more widely across our study area than most other species, but most bloodroot was harvested in central Appalachia, especially southern West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky and Southern Ohio.



Stewardship and cultivation:

Bloodroot is easiest to spot in the early spring when it is blooming and most of the forest floor is bare, but harvesting roots after it produces seed in midsummer gives it a chance to reproduce. At that time, bloodroot can still be located by its distinctive leaves, but plants can also be flagged and harvested after the foliage dies back. Leaving smaller plants to grow and leaving parts of the root in the ground are also good stewardship practices.

Most bloodroot on the market is wild-harvested. Demand and prices have been volatile over the last decade as different bloodroot-based products have come in and out of use making profitability uncertain, but bloodroot can be grown fairly easily in forests and under artificial shade. The easiest method of propagation is breaking off pieces of the rhizome that contain both buds and roots, and planting them in moist, well-drained soil under 70 to 80 percent shade. Plants take 3 to 5 years to mature from root cuttings. For more information on cultivating bloodroot, visit the RootReport “Resources and References” Page.

References:

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Images courtesy of Catherine Bukowski, Jeanine Davis and Katie Trozzo.