

LOOK AGAIN !

Only rarely do we find it necessary to resort to using a hand lens in order to distinguish between two species of plants that are as tall as we are, but the genus Cimicifuga, in the buttercup family, proves that it can happen.

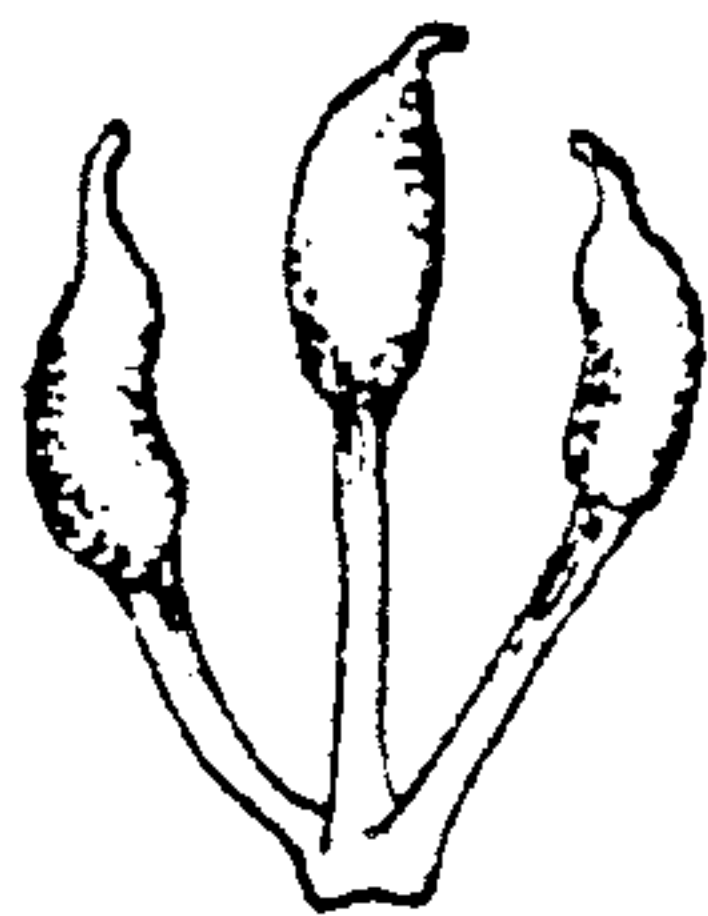
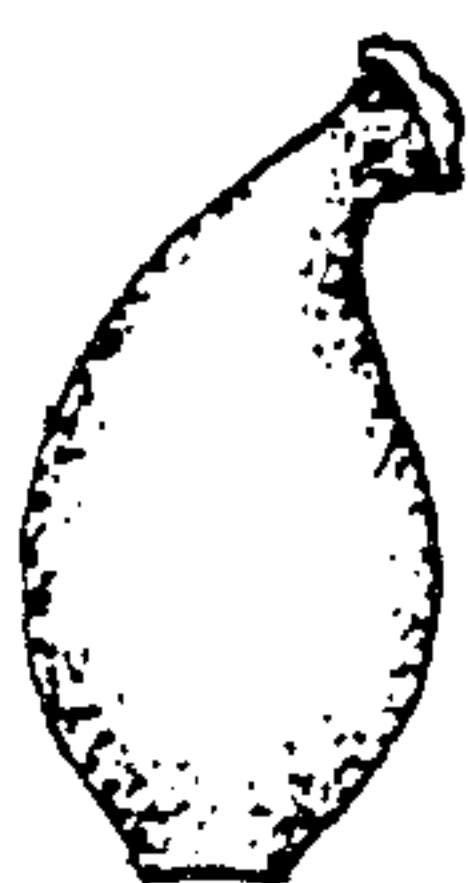
Cimicifuga racemosa (popularly known as Bugbane, Black Cohosh or Black Snakeroot) is so conspicuous and so familiar that we feel confident of being able to call it from twenty feet away without fear of contradiction, but in doing so we often forget that there is another species, C. americana.

There are not many factors to help us avoid misidentification, either. Vegetatively, the two are very similar, although C. americana does not achieve the stature of the larger specimens of C. racemosa. The former is strictly a mountain species and is restricted to the southern part of the Appalachians at that - but of course they both share that territory. It tends to bloom later, but in a given area their blooming seasons can pretty much coincide.

All this overlapping would make it difficult to separate them were it not for the fact that a close look at an individual flower will take care of the problem quickly and positively:

Cimicifuga racemosa has but a single pistil, which is stout and sessile, with a truncate style. C. americana, on the other hand, has from three to eight pistils each of which has a slender stalk, and the styles are awl-shaped.

There are other slight differences, mostly in the follicles and seeds, but if you have the plant in flower this is all you need to know.



Dick Smith