

ACTAEA - Ranunculaceae

Approx. 30 species, northern hemisphere.

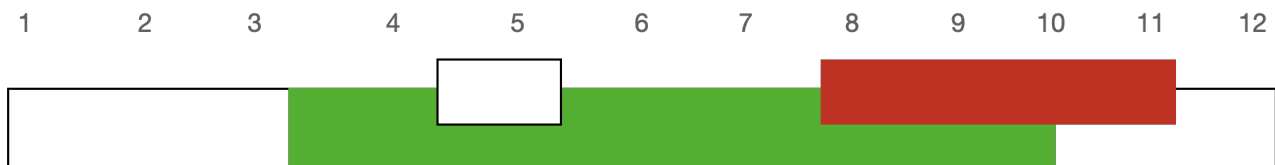
There are two clear groups:

- 1) Shorter species having relatively small flower spikes and brightly-coloured berry-like fruit, original *Actaea* species.
- 2) Generally taller, with significant flowers and (usually) dry capsule fruit. Historically classified as *Cimicifuga*. Botanists continue to be divided over the validity of keeping *Cimicifuga* separate, or combining with *Actaea*.

1) Shorter, with insignificant flowers and brightly-coloured berry-like fruit.

Actaea rubra – Baneberry (*A. alba*)

Most of North America; damp soils in woods



Height	to 0.6m-0.9m
Spread	0.3m
Foliage	Often doubly divided
Architecture	B2. Flowers held well above clumps of lower foliage
Flowers	Rounded spikes cream-white flowers
Post-flowering	Striking red berries (toxic to humans)
Longevity	10+, Long-lived
Spread mode	Caulophyte, Phalanx
Underground	Rhizomes so short that plant effectively forms a crown-like
Spread Rate	Slow
Persistence	High
Clump Density	High
Standing	Firm
Seeding	Occasionally reported
Soil	Organic matter - rich woodland soils best
Moisture	Intolerant of drying out
Light	Light shade, sun only if soil never dries out
Hardiness	USDA zone 2

var. neglecta has dramatic white berries, tipped black.

Actaea pachypoda – White Cohosh (*Midwest and eastern North America; heavier soils in woods*)

has dramatic white berries, tipped black, on pink stems. Moderate seeding often reported.

Actaea spicata – (Much of temperate Eurasia) has black berries.



Actaea rubra, at Hergest Croft, England.



Actaea racemosa 'Blickfang', at Jimi Blake's, Ireland

2) Taller, with significant flower spikes and dry capsule fruit.

***Actaea racemosa* - Black cohosh**

Eastern North America; woodland edge on a variety of soils



Height	1.4-2.0m
Spread	0.25-0.5m
Foliage	Large, doubly divided, distinctive before flowering
Architecture	B2 - Flowers held well above clumps of lower foliage
Flowers	Off-white in very tall spikes, pleasantly scented
Post-flowering	2-3 months seed head interest
Longevity	10+, Long-lived
Spread mode	Caulophyte, Phalanx
Underground	Rhizomes so short that plant effectively forms a crown-like clump
Spread Rate	Slow

Persistence	High
Clump Density	High
Standing	Firm
Seeding	Occasionally reported
Soil	Rich in organic matter preferred
Moisture	Low tolerance of summer drought
Light	Light shade at lower latitudes
Hardiness	USDA Zone 3

Impressive plants for woodland edge or other light shade situations where conditions are suitable.

'**Blickfang**' is strikingly upright.

The following are very similar in performance, and general appearance.

A. dahurica typically features multiple flower spikes

A. japonica usually as cultivar '**Cheju-do**', to 1m.

A. simplex, is usually seen as a purple foliage form, as in **Atropurpurea Group**, or '**Brunette**'; '**Pritchards's Variety**' is taller, at 2m plus.

A. 'Queen of Sheba' PBR is a hybrid of the Asian species *Actaea simplex* and the American *Actaea racemosa* from a cross made in the Netherlands by Piet Oudolf (Chicago Botanic Garden). Dark foliage and drooping flower spikes.



Actaea dahurica, Sichtungsgarten Hermannshof



Actaea simplex 'Pritchard's Variety', Powis Castle, Wales.

Images

Group 2

A. racemosa

<https://davisla4.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/actaea-racemosa-2.jpg>

A. dahurica

https://static.wixstatic.com/media/d268f4_49c09988d2c04f079aa8ccf0154eb9fd~mv2.jpg/v1/fill/w_436,h_581,al_c,q_80,usm_0.66_1.00_0.01,enc_auto/Actaea%20dahurica.jpg

https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/1069/2032/products/Actaea_dahurica_3_nbrcg_mbg_1024x1024.jpg?v=1449683174

'Chejo-Do'

https://www.guidovandesteen.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Actaea-jap-Cheju-Do_web.jpg

https://s3.amazonaws.com/finegardening.s3.tauntoncloud.com/app/uploads/2022/07/25153325/FG207Brand-Cheju-Do-Japanese-bugbane_DK-.jpg

https://groeneparadijs.nl/media/catalog/product/cache/4749daa9d7edd9f9838910af1a0d84eb/a/c/actaea_japonica_cheju-do_-_zilverkaars2.jpg

A. simplex

<https://proctorsnursery.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Actaea-Black-Negligee-fp-683x1024.jpg>

https://www.pepiniere-bretagne.fr/images/Photo_plantes/ACTASIWH_4.jpg

<https://www.promessedefleurs.com/media/catalog/product/A/c/Actaea-simplex-80716-1.jpg>

A. 'Queen of Sheba'

https://www.farmergracy.co.uk/cdn/shop/files/actaea-queen-of-sheba-4_x778_crop_center@2x.jpg?v=1695040565

https://live.staticflickr.com/3683/9952017304_2a7cf50d6c_b.jpg