

Oplopanax horridus (Smith) Miq.

Island Hu'iqumínu'm Name(s): qwa'pulhp or qwa'puļp

Upriver Halkomelem Name: qwó:pelhp

English name: Devil's club

Family: Araliaceae (Ginseng family)

The name *Oplopanax horridus* was derived from the Greek words “hoplon” meaning “weapon” and “panakos” meaning “all-heal.” Its species name refers to its formidable prickly appearance (Bressette 2017). *O. horridus* is in the ginseng family; “panax” is the genus name for ginseng (eflora BC 2018).

Identifying characteristics:

Devil's club is a deciduous perennial shrub with an upright habit reaching an average height of 90 – 275 cm (Bressette 2017). Stems are densely packed and armed with spines that continue along leaf petioles and leaf veins. The palmate leaves are alternately arranged and very large, ranging from 20-40 cm in width, with 5-13 lobes and are sharply toothed along their margins (KPU 2015). From mid-spring to summer plants produce a large upright spike of small, light green to white florets, each with 5 petals (Summer 1998). By mid to late-summer pollinated flowers form clusters of small red drupes (KPU 2015).



Distribution:

Devil's club is a native species in Canada and is found in British Columbia, Alberta (USDA 2018), and in some areas north of Lake Superior in Ontario (virtualmuseum 2005). It also occurs in the southwestern part of the Yukon Territory, and in the United States where its range extends from Alaska to Montana and as far south as Oregon (USDA 2018).

Habitat: *Oplopanax horridus* is a shade-loving plant typically found in forest understories, especially those of old-growth forests. It is often located along streams or near streams where there is water seepage. It is commonly found in communities containing western red-cedar, western hemlock, alder

and Sitka spruce (USDA 2018) as well as with skunk cabbage, lady fern (Summer 1998) sedges, horsetails, and various huckleberries or blueberries (USDA 2018). They are tolerant of a wide range of soil types from sandy to silty and well-drained to poorly-drained soil and prefer acidic soils (USDA 2018).

Reproduction & Cultivation: Devil's club is slow to grow and spreads by layering. Once a clone has established its own roots, it detaches from the mother plant. This species reproduces via seeds, which are dispersed mostly in the droppings of black bears (Luna 2001). Propagating *O. horridus* from seed is a long and complicated process, so most often this plant is produced by vegetative reproduction including stem cuttings and division of stem suckers in the dormant season (Bressette 2017).

Seed can take almost 5 years to germinate and requires more time to grow to transplantable sizes (Luna 2001). Glacier National Park Native Plant Nurseries grew Devil's club for a restoration project and had success with a 400-day stratification cycle divided into 4 x 100 day warm-moist and cool-moist periods followed by specific growing conditions involving soil, fertilizer, and pot shape (Luna 2001). Because of this, they are not commonly propagated and grow almost exclusively in the wild. As this species is increasing in popularity because of its antibacterial properties, nursery propagation and distribution is vital to reduce pressures from over-harvesting wild populations (Luna 2001).

Wildlife value: The berry-like drupes are a favorite among bears as are young leaves and shoots (Howard 1993). The leaves are consumed by slugs and deer have been known to browse (Summer 1998), however, because of the sharp spines this plant is not a popular browsing wildlife food (Howard 1993). As Devil's club is often found near streams, it contributes much-needed shade and protection for salmon and their eggs. It also provides refuge for small mammals and birds (Howard 1993).

Ethnobotany: Devil's club has been highly valued among many Indigenous people and continues to be used across its native range for a wide variety of applications. Over 30 different medical remedies have been recorded (Lantz 2004). The inner bark of the stem is the most commonly used part of *O. horridus*, and has been used to treat diabetes, cancer, gallstones, gastrointestinal issues, and arthritis as well as a means of birth control and as an appetite stimulant (Lantz 2004). Moreover, the berries have been used to treat heart disease, lice, and dandruff. Roots were used to treat respiratory ailments including tuberculosis, as well as a skin wash for acne. Stems were used to facilitate weight loss, and the whole plant could be used to treat arthritis (Lantz 2004). Finally, the sharp spines were used as fishing hooks or lures (Luna 2001).

Devil's club has a major spiritual role with Indigenous people, including purification and cleansing. Rituals include bathing in a mixture of the inner bark and wearing a piece of prickly bark as a medicinal amulet to help protect against evil or supernatural beings (Lantz 2004). It was also considered to bring good luck and helped shamans acquire supernatural powers. Additionally, *O. horridus* was used to cleanse or purify a home after a death (Lantz 2004). Charcoal collected after burning the plant was used as tattoo ink and dye, and was mixed with grease and used to make face paint for spirit dancers (Luna 2001).

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Image:

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