

Forest Farming Quick Guide

Black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*)

Black cohosh is a perennial forest herb found throughout eastern hardwood forests and has a long history of harvest and use in North America. It has been used traditionally to aid in the birthing process and currently used as a natural means of hormone replacement therapy and as an anti-spasmodic for pain. Much of the black cohosh on the market, an estimated 95 percent, is harvested from wild populations, indicating a need for intentionally cultivated material.

Site Selection:

- North and east facing hillsides with gentle to moderate slopes.
- Rich, well-drained soils high in organic matter, with a pH between 5.5 or 6.5.
- Between 30 and 70 percent shade provided by forest canopy composed of sugar maple, tulip poplar, basswood, hickories, birch, beech, buckeye, and other deciduous species.
- Presence of companion herbs in forest understory, including trillium, toothwort, American ginseng, bloodroot, trout lily, bellwort, and goldenseal.

Site Preparation and Maintenance:

- Remove large sticks and debris that will interfere with planting process.
- Selectively prune or remove competitive or suppressive understory trees and shrubs to improve air flow and optimize light conditions.
- Manually remove non-native invasive plant species.
- Regularly inspect planting site for signs of disease, animal browse, poaching, insect damage, or other causes of mortality.
- Repeat pruning, weeding, and inspecting as needed to maintain ideal growing conditions.

Planting:

- Plant roots in fall or early spring.
- Plant approximately 2 inches deep
- Plant with the bud facing up and the fibrous roots spread out laterally
- Place the root cuttings 18-24 inches apart.
- Re-cover roots with soil and 2 inches of leaf litter.

Propagation:

- To propagate via rhizomes, cut a mature root into 1.5-3 inch divisions, each section with a viable bud and fibrous roots.
- Plant root cuttings using the same method as described above.
- To propagate via seed, collect seeds in the fall and sow immediately.
- Sow seed ½ inch deep and 1.5-2 inches apart in prepared woodland nursery beds and cover with 1 inch of hardwood leaf litter.

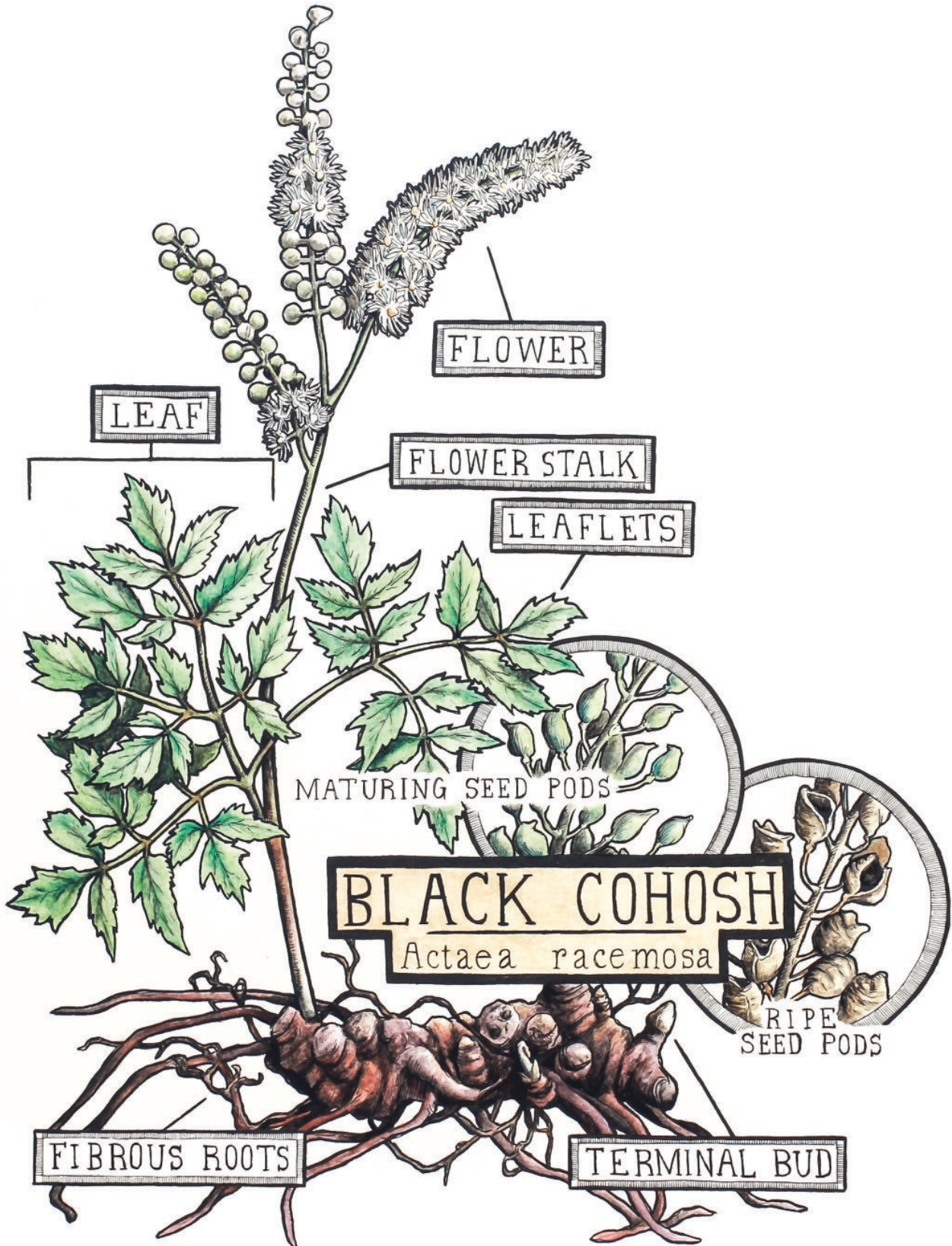


APPALACHIAN BEGINNING
FOREST FARMER COALITION



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



LEAF

FLOWER

FLOWER STALK

LEAFLETS

MATURING SEED PODS

BLACK COHOSH

Actaea racemosa

RIPE SEED PODS

FIBROUS ROOTS

TERMINAL BUD