

Rattlesnake Master
***Eryngium yuccifolium* - Apiaceae**



Rattlesnake master - the name is enough to get you thinking. But there is more. You can still see 8000-year-old sandals made from it. You can imagine a shaman chewing its roots before picking up a rattlesnake. You can envision another kingdom meeting at its blossoms. And today you can still see it growing in the tall prairie.

The use of rattlesnake master can be traced back to more than 8,000 years ago. A collection of sandals was recovered from a dry cave in Missouri. One of the sandals was radiocarbon dated to 6,375 BC. The source plant used in all the sandals was from the leaves of rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*).

For at least 8,000 years in the southeastern United States, rattlesnake master was critical in the production of perishable artifacts including bags, blankets, skirts, and robes. The southeastern United States has several significant karst regions with large, dry caves and numerous bluff shelters. The conditions there are just right for the preservation of organic materials.

After going back 8,000 years, the 18th century doesn't seem that far away. It was in the 1700s that James Adair first documented the medicinal uses of rattlesnake master. He recounted tales in which Native Americans chewed the root, blew it on their hands, and then handled rattlesnakes without any damage. But the root was more often used in bitter teas as an antidote for various maladies - general disease, snakebites, expelling worms, etc.

Today I don't think much weaving is going on using rattlesnake master. And I don't think it is used as an antidote to rattlesnake bites any more. But today there is a community use of this plant from another kingdom - beneficial insects.

The *Apiaceae* or carrot family attracts many beneficial insects. In fact, it is one of the best plant families to attract these insects. Rattlesnake master is in this family. Lady bugs, hover flies, tachinid flies, lacewings, and parasitic wasps are all over the small flowers of rattlesnake master - some pollinating; others attacking pests.

Rattlesnake master can benefit gardens too. Not only because this plant attracts beneficial insects, but also because it is attractive from bloom time in July right through to the end of fall. Being a plant of the tall prairie, this perennial needs full sun and well drained soil. It is best placed near the front of a garden. That way you see the beautiful yucca like foliage and flowers

that stay white for months. This will be a star in your garden - an architectural plant that will grow to 2 metres but not crowd out your view of other plants.

Rattlesnake master - a plant to weave with, a plant to heal, and hopefully always a plant in tall prairies.



Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) blooming in my garden

<https://wimastergardener.org/article/plant-flowers-to-encourage-beneficial-insects>
<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/281/5373/72>
<https://archeology.uark.edu/artifacts/wovenshoe/>
<https://www.tallahassee.com/story/life/food/2018/07/26/carrot-family-provides-cornucopia-insects/837378002>