Monkshood *(Aconitum napellus and Aconitum vulparia)*
Also known as: wolfsbane, devil’s helmet, blue rocket and leopard’s bane

**Symptoms:** Bid farewell to those who meet the poison in this plant: death comes within the hour. At first, the victim will suffer pains in the stomach and a numbness of the tongue and mouth. Perchance the skin will also feel a touch cold and clammy. Larger amounts put a person into paralysis and convulsions. The victim will writhe in agony until the heart is stopped cold.

*The toxin puts the victim in shock.*

Powerful neurotoxins and cardiotoxins such as aconitine are found in all parts of the plant, especially the root. They disrupt nerve-to-muscle signals, killing a person by heart attack.

**Where to find it:** Monkshood grows back every year, but ‘tis not especially common. It is located in northern temperate climates around the world. This plant is found in woodlands and meadows. Pray be careful handling it, though. If it happens to get into even a small cut, you could be in trouble!

*There are even reports of florists getting sick after working with the flowers.*

**Anatomy:**
- Grows four to five feet tall
- Has dark blue to purple blossoms that look like the hood on a robe worn by a monk.
- The dangerous toxins are present in the stems, leaves, flowers and roots.
- The roots are most toxic in the autumn after the upper part of the plant has withered.
- Leaves more powerful if ground up
- Just a few grams of dried or fresh plant matter are lethal to even the healthiest of adults.
- *Beware, its roots have been occasionally mistaken for horseradish.*
**Medicinal Uses?**

Monkshood is sometimes used in extract form as an anti-inflammatory agent, but this is extremely risky because of the plant’s toxicity.

**Taming Cerberus**

Legendary Greek hero Hercules went to subdue Cerberus, the three-headed hound that guarded the gates of the underworld. After much labor, Hercules finally pulled Cerberus hither into the light of day. The sunshine terrified Cerberus and as he struggled against Hercules, drops of poisonous foam fell from his mouths onto the ground. And where these drops landed, poisonous plants called aconite sprouted.

Monkshood was called aconite by the Greeks because the cave Hercules supposedly pulled Cerberus out of was near the village of Akonai.

**Worthy Wolfsbane**

Greek herders used one species of Aconitum to rid themselves of the wolves that harassed their livestock. First they rubbed the plant’s roots and stems onto their arrows. Then they stood watch over their herd, with bows and arrows in hand. When a wolf attacked, they shot it. The poison quickly killed the wolf. That is why Aconitum also goes by the common name of “wolfsbane”—it means “that which causes the death of wolves.”