

The genus of *Eryngium* is a large group of cosmopolitan plants found in many parts of the Old and New Worlds. It belongs to the Apiaceae family that used to be known as Umbelliferae. This is the family that includes such umbel bearing plants as Queen Anne's Lace and water penny, *Hydrocotyle* sp. Cultivated family members are carrot, celery, and some ornamentals. The family contains some poisonous plants. Water hemlock, *Cicuta maculata*, is an exotic that is frequently found growing wild in Louisiana. This is a family of botanical characters, and our subject plant, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, is certainly no exception. It is found in almost all of the Louisiana parishes except the Delta Lands along the Mississippi River. A colleague on frequent field trips, Joe Stucky of Texarkana, Arkansas, has aptly described it as a dicot that thinks it is a monocot. The common name is button snakeroot. Apparently, this is a name that goes back into Indian lore, when so many plants were used in some manner for snake bites. I do not know how it was used for snake bites. Snake bites must have been a common thing among the American Indians as there are so many plants with "snake" as part of their common name.

Eryngium yuccifolium grows in sunny to partially shady ditches or open woodlands where there is some seasonal moisture, but a dry summer. The umbels are compressed into small heads at the ends of stems that have leaves with parallel veining and usually a winter rosette of leaves. These winter leaves are about three to five inches long with soft bristly edges. In fact and in fancy, the leaves do have some appearance to some yucca seedlings. As warm weather progresses, the thin leaves grow long and narrow. They grow ten to twelve inches long and a half-inch wide, in bunches of six to ten. A stem comes from the center, and it usually grows to two feet in height, bearing some leaves, with several branches at the top. Each branch ends in a terminal flower cluster that is greenish in color, never really developing any bright color at all. The flower heads are roughly one inch long and about as half wide. They are composed of individual flowers that barely open. They are more interesting than beautiful. A single plant will develop root stolons. In a year or so, there will be several stems developing. It is not an invasive plant, but its flowering appearance is enhanced by any colorful flowering plant nearby. It is easily transplanted from a wild population into a garden setting. Its major requirement seems to be well drained sandy type soil in a sunny place. As often as I have seen this plant, I haven't seen it bothered by an insect, nor have I seen butterflies, bees, or hummingbirds use it as a food source. I have not seen it browsed by white-tailed deer or rabbits. Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who lives and gardens near Calion, Arkansas.

Additional notes on Button Snakeroot: Carl Amason's plant profiles frequently send me to my personal library and occasionally other folk's libraries, too, in search of illustrations and additional information. In the case of this article on *Eryngium yuccifolium*, Button snakeroot, which is also known as Rattlesnake-master, I decided to share the result of my digging. Geyata Ajilvsgi, in her book, *Wildflowers of Texas*¹, states that the Cherokee used this plant to ward off whooping cough in children, and that the root is supposed to contain a strong stimulant. She also states it was used as a remedy for snakebite, hence its common name. I inherited a good many books on herbal/Indian/folklore remedies from my mother. One of those, *Earth Medicine-Earth Foods*², by Michael A. Weiner, gave many uses for the plant. Pounded roots were supposedly used by the Creeks as a diuretic. He states that the Natchez of Mississippi put the chewed stem and leaves into their noses to stop nosebleeds. Other tribes used concoctions of pounded root to reduce fever. It was used by several tribes as an emetic. It has been reported to have been used as a stimulant, diuretic, and expectorant. Sam Touchstone, of Princeton, La. mentions the plant in his book, *Herbal and Folk Medicine of Louisiana and Adjacent States*.³ He states

that it was used for throat ailments and was considered a cure for diphtheria is late as the 1930s. Beth Erwin is secretary of the LNPS, curator of Kalorama Nature Preserve.

1Ajilvsgi, Geyata, 1984. Wildflowers of Texas, Fredericksburg, TX: Shearer Publishing.

2Weiner, Michael A., 1972. Earth Medicine—Earth Foods, New York, NY: MacMillan Company.

3Touchstone, Samuel J., 1983. Herbal and Folk Medicine of Louisiana and Adjacent States, Princeton, LA: Folk-Life Books.