

## Solomon's Seal – Looks Like King Solomon's Official Seal

*Polygonatum biflorum*



*Polygonatum biflorum*, a Virginia native plant

Photo: [www.illinoiswildflowers.info](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info)



*Polygonatum odoratum var. pluriflorum  
'Variegatum'*

GPMGA Herb Garden, Reynolds Community College



**Roots** (*Polygonatum odoratum var.*

*pluriflorum 'Variegatum'*)

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### How did Solomon's Seal get its name?

When the leaf stalk breaks away from the root stalk, it leaves a scar said to resemble the official seal of King Solomon.

### Description:

*Polygonatum biflorum*, a woodland plant, grows in an upright stalk two-three feet in height with alternating, oval smooth leaves.

**Note:** *P. biflorum* has a look alike called false Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum canadense*). If the plants are in bloom it's easy to distinguish the two. Depending on the region in Virginia, that can be any time from April to June. The whitish-green bell-shaped flowers of Solomon's seal emerge from underneath the leaves dangling in groups from the axils of the leaves. On the other hand, false Solomon's Seal has what is called terminal inflorescence--a cluster of whitish flowers appearing at the tip of the stem. Both plants grow from rhizomes. Both plants have berries.

The Solomon Seal's blue-colored berries are eaten by birds, but are poisonous to humans.

Solomon's Seal is shade tolerant and spreading yet not considered invasive. Its foliage is interesting and beautiful. The plant grows well in dry to moist soil in partial to full shade. It'll even tolerate growing at the base of trees.

#### **Species:**

Most of the approximately 60 species occur in Asia with 20 in China alone. *P. hirtum*, *P. hookeri*, *P. humile*, *P. multiflorum*, *P. odoratum*, *P. stewardii* and *P. verticillatum* are used in gardening and landscaping.

#### **Food:**

Leaves, stems and rhizomes are used raw or cooked as a side dish with meat and rice. The rhizomes are also used for tea or soaked in wine or liquor to flavor beverages. The rhizome of *P. sibiricum* is pulped, boiled, strained and thickened with barley flour to prepare a sweet, liquid seasoning called **tangxi**. Historically, *P. megaphyllum*, was also eaten during times of famine. The American species, *P. biflorum*, has a starchy root that was eaten like the potato and used as flour for bread by Native Americans.

#### **Medicine:**

Solomon's seal is used to treat lung disorders, reduce inflammation, and as an astringent. Some apply Solomon's seal directly to the skin for bruises, ulcers, or boils on the fingers, hemorrhoids, skin redness, and water retention. Side effects include stomach upset and diarrhea.

Solomon's Seal might reduce blood sugar levels. Solomon's Seal was tested for the treatment of diabetes in the 1930s by Hedwig Langecker. Langecker, a German pharmacologist, concluded *P. officinale* and *P. multiflorum* were effective in treating hypoglycemia.

But even today, there is some concern it may interfere with blood sugar levels during and after surgery. Diabetics should use Solomon's Seal with caution or only consulting their physician.

*P. verticillatum* was used as an aphrodisiac.

#### **Sources:**

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*The Virginia Wildflower Organization*, [www.virginiawildflowers.org](http://www.virginiawildflowers.org)

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