

*Acanthus mollis*

[Synonyms : *Acanthus latifolius*, *Acanthus lusitanicus*, *Acanthus spinulosus*]

**BEAR’S-BREECHES** is a semi-evergreen perennial. Native to southern Europe it has purple-veined, lilac-pink, light-blue or white flowers.

It is also known as *Acanthe* (French), *Acanthus*, *Acanto* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Akanthus* (German), *Akant mäkký* (Slovak), *Akantus* (Danish, Swedish), *Bearsfoot*, *Björnkloört* (Swedish), *Branc-ursine* (French), *Branche-ursine* (French), *Brank ursine*, *Dornenloser Akanthus* (German), *Erva Gigante* (Portuguese), Greek *acanthos*, *Kreikanakantti* (Finnish), *Mjukakantus* (Swedish), *Oyster plant*, *Patte d’ours* (French), *Paznehtuik měkký* (Czech), *Weiche Bärenklaue* (German), and *Weicher Akanthus* (German).

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

*Mollis* is Latin (soft) meaning ‘softly hairy or velvety tenderness’.

Many authorities believe that it was this species not acanthus (*Acanthus spinosus*) that initially inspired Callimachus (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC) the Greek architect, to adopt its thistle-like leaf shape as an architectural decoration – which in turn led to its far wider use by the ancient Greeks and the Romans as a decorative feature (as well as by more recent craftsmen).

While some authorities suggest that bear’s-breeches may have been introduced to Britain by at least the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, others believe it arrived in England from Italy in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, possibly 1548.

Medicinally, crushed leaves and roots have been used locally in poultices for treating burns, and scalds, and in decoction for diarrhoea. The plant was also made into a paste that was applied to broken limbs to aid their recovery.