

Adiantum capillus-veneris

[Synonyms : *Adiantum capillus*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, *Adiantum capillus*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *fissum*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *laciniatum*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *modestum*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *protusum*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *rimicola*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris* var. *trifidum*, *Adiantum michelii*, *Adiantum modestum*, *Adiantum paradiseae*, *Adiantum schaffneri*, *Adiantum tenerum* var. *dissectum*]

MAIDENHAIR FERN is a semi-evergreen or evergreen fern. Native to Britain, central and southern Europe, southern North America and to Hawaii it has glossy brownish-black stems and delicate, bright yellowish-green leaflets.

It is also known as *Adiante* (French), *Adianthe* (French), *Adianto* (Italian, Spanish), *Adianto venushara* (Esperanto), *Ægte Venushår* (Danish), Aphrodite's hair style, *Baldiri kara* (Turkish), Black maidenhair, *Capel* (Italian), *Capel-venere* (Italian), *Capel-venere comune* (Italian), *Capilera* (Spanish), *Capillaire* (French), *Capillaire cheveux-de-Vénus* (French), *Capillaire commun* (French), *Capillaire de Montpellier* (French), *Capillaithe* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Capillarkraut* (German), *Capovenere* (Italian), *Chevelure*, *Cheveux de Vénus* (French), Common maidenhair, *Capilera* (Spanish), *Culantrillo de pozo* (Spanish), Dudder grass, *Europees venushaar* (Dutch), Fern, *Frauenhaar* (German), *Frauenhaarfarn* (German), *Galmarium* (Indian), Hair of Venus, *Hannewija* (Maltese), *Hansa padi* (Persian), *Hansorga* (Indian), *Hansrago* (Indian), *Hansraj* (Hindi, Urdu), *Jungfernhhaar* (German), *Kapillarkraut* (German), *Kimilcede* (Turkish), *Krafas-al-bir* (Arabic), *Kuzburat-el-bir* (Arabic), Lady's hair, Maidenhair, Maria's fern, Mattress fern, *Mubarakha* (Indian), *Mubarkh* (Indian), *Netik venušin vlas* (Czech), *Parosi-ava-shana* (Arabic), *Râjahansa* (Indian), Rock fern, *Shuir-el-jin* (Arabic), Southern maiden hair, Southern maidenhair-fern, True maidenhair, *Venere* (Italian), *Venuksenhiussanianen* (Finnish), Venus fern, *Venushaar* (German), *Venushaarfarn* (German), *Venushår* (Danish, Swedish), Venus hair, Venus maidenhair, Virgin's fern, and *Vrouehaar* (Afrikaans); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of discretion, fascination, magic, secrecy, and 'secret bond of love'.

Maidenhair fern was a protected species in Cape Province (South Africa) in the 1950s and may well still be today.

Capillus-veneris is derived from Latin *capillus* (hair) and Venus (goddess of love) components meaning 'the hair of Venus' which, in Roman legend, the fern was said to represent as she rose up from the sea - and this led to the name Maidenhair.

While in Texas (North America) and no doubt other English-speaking communities, the fern was known as Mattress fern because its fronds were used as a pillow or mattress stuffing. The Romans dedicated this fern to Venus, the goddess of love – and in Christian lore the plant is a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

Maidenhair fern has an unusual quality. Under water it will glisten with a silvery sheen but upon removal it will be perfectly dry as the water will not cling to it ie. the basis for the believed derivation of the genus name.

Hawaiians once used the leafstalks for weaving baskets. While on the mainland of southern North America, the Mahuna Indians of south-western California used the plant to treat

rheumatism, and the Kayenta Navajo tribe of north-eastern Arizona neutralized bumble-bee or centipede stings with an infusion of the plant. The latter also prescribed a plant infusion or smoked the dried plant as a remedy for some neurological problems.

The plant once had a name for making hair curl and locally it was also mixed with ashes, olive oil and vinegar as one of the innumerable treatments for baldness

In addition to its use in hair tonics the fern's fronds have been used as a cake decoration by Victorian matrons in 19th Century Britain and the fern has also provided a flavouring for various drinks. Today a popular Portuguese drink called *capilè* is made from maidenhair fern syrup mixed with cold water and grated lemon zest. In Ireland the dried fronds have been used as a tea substitute, and on the European mainland 'Bavarian tea' as it is known is made by making an infusion of ordinary tea with the addition of chopped fronds. This last is normally taken as a medicine.

Medicinally, the plant has long been in use. The 1st Century Greek physician, Pedanius Dioscorides, includes reference to it in his celebrated *De materia medica*. For decades in France until the 19th Century it was the most important ingredient in a famed cough syrup called *capillaire* – respected on both sides of the English Channel. Herbalists have recommended the plant in the treatment of pleurisy, jaundice, swollen joints and period problems and it is understood, with little effect, asthma. It is still used today for various chest ailments and also as a mild laxative.

It is the birthday flower for 22nd March.