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### *Agave polianthes*

[Synonyms : *Polianthes tuberosa*]

**TUBEROSE** (English, German) is a tuberous perennial. Native to Mexico it has flushed pink outside, white flowers with a sweet penetrating, cloying fragrance.

It is also known as *Azucena* (Spanish), *Bělokvět* (Czech), Double pearl tuberose, *Gulshaba* (Hindi, Punjabi), Mistress-of-the-night, *Nelasampenga* (Telugu), *Rajanigandha* (Bengali, Sanskrit), Silver leaf, *Sundal malam* (Malay), *Sundel malem* (Javanese, Sundanese), *Tubéreuse* (French), *Tuberoos* (Dutch), *Tuberos* (Swedish), *Tuberosa* (Finnish, Italian), and *Tuberoso* (Esperanto); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of dangerous pleasures, 'I have seen a lovely girl', and voluptuousness.

The flowers open towards nightfall. There are single and double varieties.

The buds are collected from main stems early in the morning. The flowers which are harvested in very late Summer have essence extracted from them during the hours of darkness when their perfume is at its height. An essence is also extracted from the earlier flowering bulbs. Despite the perfume's power it evaporates rapidly and needs a fixative such as vanilla essence (*Vanilla planifolia*) to maintain it.

Warning – the underground stems can cause vomiting.

*Polianthes* is derived from Greek *polio-* (grey, whitish, grizzled) and *antho-* (flower) components.

It was introduced to Europe in 1594 and it had reached the Far East by at least the middle of the following Century.

Tuberose essence can be adulterated with that from lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*). Today the perfumery industry uses this essence in delicate oriental perfumes.

Certainly during the Edwardian era in England (at the beginning of the 20th Century) these scented flowers were thought by many to have aphrodisiacal qualities. Thus bunches of tuberose were often sent to a lady-love as roses (*Rosa*) would be today.

The Chinese have wound the flowers into chaplets and worn them as head-dresses.

In Java (now an Indonesian island) the flowers are added to a kind of vegetable soup.

Medicinally, the dried and powdered bulbs have been used in India in the treatment of some venereal disease, particularly gonorrhoea.