

Alcea rosea

[Synonyms : *Alcea chinensis*, *Alcea ficifolia*, *Althaea chinensis*, *Althaea mexicana*, *Althaea rosea*, *Althaea sinensis*]

HOLLYHOCK is an annual, biennial or perennial. Possibly a hybrid from a species native to Crete and Turkey it has cream, pink, purple, red, white or yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Alcea vossa* (Italian), *Althaea rose*, *Bastun ta' San Guzepp* (Maltese), *Bysmalow*, *Common hollyhock*, *Garden hollyhock*, *Gülhatem çiç* (Turkish), *Gulkhera* (Hindi), *Hock*, *Hock-holler*, *Hocysen Bendigaid* (Welsh), *Hollinholcke*, *Holy hoke*, *Holy mallow*, *Ibis ružový* (Slovak), *Khatmi* (Arabic, Persian), *Malva flowers*, *Malva rosa* (Italian), *Passe-rose* (French), *Proskurník topolovka* (Czech), *Rosa di mare* (Italian), *Rose mallow*, *Rose trémière* (French), *St. Cuthbert's cole*, *Stockros* (Swedish), *Stockrosen* (German), *Stokroos* (Dutch), *Tarhasalkoruuusu* (Finnish), *Thục quỳ* (Vietnamese), and *Topolovka růžová* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ambition, fecundity, female ambition (white), and fruitfulness.

The flowers are pollinated primarily by bees.

Rosea means 'rose-like, rosy or rose-coloured' with reference to the flowers.

Authorities seem to disagree on how and when the plant was introduced to Britain where eventually it was to become a feature of cottage gardens. Some say it was introduced by the Crusaders in about the 12th or 13th Centuries. This could be supported by the fact that the Old English name for Mallow (used for the familiar native European marsh-mallow) was *hoc* and the plant could have been called the 'holy hoc' – thereby Hollyhock means 'holy great one'. Others suggest it was brought with the Huguenots in the 16th Century from mainland Europe – or in that same Century, and deemed least likely today, the plant was brought to Europe from China.

A poem by Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) entitled *Song*, mentions the hollyhock

Heavily hangs the broad sunflower
Over its grave i' the earth so chilly;
Heavily hangs the hollyhock
Heavily hangs the tiger-lily.

It was introduced to North America by the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, and the North American Shinnecock Indians of Long Island are said to have adopted it medicinally and applied a flower infusion to ease skin inflammation.

The flowers of the darker coloured varieties yield an edible purple dye which is used to colour teas and wines, and they are a familiar sight in wine-growing areas where they are widely cultivated.

Medicinally, the dried, double purple flowers used to be infused and the liquor drunk as a tisane for easing chest disorders, and it was also used as a treatment for worms in children, to prevent miscarriages and to disperse blood clots. A poultice of leaves was applied to wasp and bee stings as a remedy, and also on inflammation. An infusion of the plant provided a mouthwash and a soothing treatment for coughs. It was also used for the treatment of gastric ailments or cystitis.

It is the birthday flower for 25th June.