

Amaranthus hybridus

[Synonyms : *Amaranthus chlorostachys*, *Amaranthus hybridus* var. *quitensis*, *Amaranthus hypochondriacus*, *Amaranthus incurvatus*, *Amaranthus melancholicus*, *Amaranthus patulus*, *Amaranthus powellii*, *Amaranthus quitensis*, *Amaranthus retroflexus* var. *quitensis*]

GREEN AMARANTH is an annual. Native to the tropics and to Middle America (particularly Mexico) it has small greenish, yellowish or more often deep crimson flowers.

It is also known as *Amarant* (German), *Amarante* (French), *Amarante hybride* (French), *Amarante verte* (French), *Amaranth*, *Anampatsa* (Malagasy), *Ausgebreitete Fuchsschwanz* (German), *Balder herb*, *Bastardamarant* (German), *Bastardfuchsschwanz* (German), *Brède malabar* (French, Isle de Reunion), *Bredo-gigante* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Cape pigweed*, *Careless*, *Carurú-gigante* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Cockscomb*, *Floramor*, *Flower gentle*, *Green opened amaranth*, *Green pigweed*, *Grönamarant* (Swedish), *Grünähriger Fuchsschwanz* (German), *Honaga ao geitou* (Japanese), *Hoso ao geitou* (Japanese), *Hybrid amaranthus*, *Kaapse Misbredie* (Afrikaans), *Keerless*, *Lady bleeding*, *Laskavec rozkladitý* (Czech), *Love-lies-bleeding*, *Lovely bleeding*, *Lu sui xian* (Chinese), *Pig weed*, *Pilewort*, *Prince's feather*, *Quelite* (Mexican, Spanish), *Red amaranth*, *Red cockscomb*, *Red coxcomb*, *Slender pig weed*, *Slim amaranth*, *Smooth amaranth*, *Smooth pig weed*, *Spleen amaranth*, *Tai wan xian* (Chinese), *Tampala*, *Terere* (Kikuyu), *Top-amarant* (Danish), *Toppamarant* (Norwegian), *Tummarevonhäntä* (Finnish), *Velvet flower*, *Viljarevonhäntä* (Finnish), and *Wild beet*; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of immortality, and unfading love.

Carefully dried flowers will retain their colour for a considerable time.

Hybridus means 'hybrid or mixed'.

The western Keresan pueblos and the North American Havasupai Indian tribe of north-western Arizona all included green amaranth in their diet, the latter seeming to make the most diverse use of it. They not only used the ground seeds as flour for soups, a porridge or dumplings but also added the fresh or dried flowers and/or leaves to dishes as well, and leaves of young plants were prepared as a spinach-type (*Spinacia oleracea*) vegetable.

Some of the Keresan Indians of New Mexico and the Cherokees also found the plant to be of medicinal value. The former used a plant infusion to treat stomach ache and the latter used the leaves for period problems – and included the plant as an ingredient in a ceremonial potion as well.

The ancient Greeks are claimed by some authorities to have depicted green amaranth (whose dried flowers are unchanged from their appearance when fresh) on their tombs and on images of their gods as a symbol of immortality. [If true this raises the questions of how they came to see it and when it was introduced to Europe.] In modern poetic literature it is often used to represent immortality, constancy and fidelity.

All the amaranth species have edible young leaves that can be cooked like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), as well as edible flowers and seeds. Past civilizations have used them as a source of food and today this potential is again being recognized.

The plant has lent its name to a synthetic red colouring agent (known as 'amaranth' in English

and *amarante* in French) the use of which is still permitted commercially in the EEC for caviar. Although it was once popular for colouring cheese rind, confectionery, fruits in syrup and pork products as well, suspected cancerous qualities of this colouring matter have led to a ban on its use (other than the EEC caviar) in Russia, the United States and the EEC.

One unlikely superstition connected with green amaranth claimed that if the plant had been pulled up by the roots under a full moon and was then worn on the breast, it would have the same effect as that of wearing one of today's bullet-proof vests.

Obeying the 16th Century cult of the Doctrine of Signatures (that contended that the appearance or behaviour of the plant was itself an indication of its use) the crimson colour of the flowers led to the conviction among European herbalists that the dried flowering plant would be able to stop all kinds of bleeding.