

*Ammi majus*

[Synonyms : *Apium ammi*]

**BULLWORT** is an annual (occasionally biennial). Native to Mediterranean Europe and western Asia it has feathery white-tipped, green leaflets and tiny white flowers.

It is also known as *Bischofskraut* (German), Bishop's flower, Bishop's weed, Common bishop's weed, *Dakra* (Maltese), False bishop's weed, False Queen Anne's lace, *Grosse Knorpelmöhre* (German), Herb William, *Isosudenporkkana* (Finnish), *Knorpelmöhre* (German), Laceflower, Large bullwort, *Morač větší* (Czech), Queen Anne's lace, *Slöjsilja* (Swedish), Snowflake, and *Sudenporkkana* (Finnish).

*Majus* is derived from Latin *maior* (greater) meaning 'greater, bigger or larger'.

The seeds have long been used as a spice in Ethiopian dishes.

Records indicate that the flowers have been cultivated since the Middle Ages and, more recently, they have been grown for the cut-flower trade.

Some authorities have noted that in 1493 BC Queen Hatshepsut (c.1540-c.1481 BC), who was then ruling Egypt, sent doctors as part of an expedition to Africa. They eventually returned with, amongst other things, several drugs – and this plant is supposed to have been among them. Its root was said to have been eaten by those familiar with the trials and tribulations associated with travelling on caravan trains (particularly on the routes which crossed the deserts in the boiling sun) as it had properties that were supposed to offer some protection to the skin from the sun's rays. Whether the traditional use of the plant is true or not, it has been proved subsequently that such an application would not have been as far-fetched as it might sound. Apparently bullwort does contain a drug that promotes skin pigmentation ie. tanning, and this would, of course, help to shield the skin in such a demanding environment.

Medicinally, European herbalists have used the seeds for treating stomach upsets, fluid retention, asthma and some heart problems. Today it has attracted attention as it is now believed to be helpful in treatments for AIDS and some cancers.