

Anagallis arvensis

[Synonyms : *Anagallis arvensis* subsp. *phoenicea*, *Anagallis latifolia*, *Anagallis parviflora*, *Anagallis phoenicea*, *Anagallis platyphylla*]

SCARLET PIMPERNEL is an annual to perennial. Native to temperate zones in Europe it has tiny scarlet flowers.

It was also known as *Ackergauchheil* (German), Adder's eyes, *Anagallide* (Gujarati, Italian), *Anagalo agra* (Esperanto), *Anagalo ruĝa* (Esperanto), *Baromette ès pouôrres gens* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Bipinella, Bird's eye, Bird's tongue, Blue pimpernel, *Brathlys* (Welsh), Burnet rose, Change-of-the-weather, Clock flower, Common pimpernel, Cry baby, Cry baby crab, Cure all, *Dhabbar* (Punjabi), *Drchnička rol'ná* (Slovak), *Drchnička rolní* (Czech), Drops of blood, Eyebright, *Gauchheil* (German), Grandfather's weatherglass, *Guichelheil* (Dutch), *Gwlydd Mair* (Welsh), *Harira hamra* (Maltese), John-go-to-bed-at-noon, *Jonkmari* (Hindi), Ladybird, Laughter bringer, Little Jane, Little Joan, Little peeper, *Morrião* (Portuguese), *Mouron des champs* (French), *Murajes* (Spanish), Numpinole, Old man, Old man's friend, Old man's glass eye, Old man's weatherglass, Owl's eye, *Peltopuna-alpi* (Finnish), Pheasant's eye, Pimpernel (Afrikaans, English), *Pimpernelle* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Ploughmen's weatherglass, Poison chickweed, Poisonweed, Poor man's weatherglass, Red bird's eye, Red chickweed, Red pimpernel, Red weed, *Rödarv* (Swedish), *Rød arve* (Danish), *Rödmire* (Swedish), *Sabungheyt* (Arabic), *Seamair mhuire* (Irish Gaelic), Shepard's delight, Shepherd's barometer, Shepherd's calendar, Shepherd's clock, Shepherd's delight, Shepherd's dial, Shepherd's glass, Shepherd's joy, Shepherd's sundial, Shepherd's warning, Shepherd's watch, Shepherd's weatherglass, Snapjack, Sunflower, Tom pimpernel, Twelve o'clocks, Weatherflower, Weatherglass, Weatherteller, Week-a-peep, Wink-and-peep, and Wink-a-peep; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of assignation, change, childhood, faithfulness, and 'one who functions in the dark'.

The flower's bright colour is only on the upper surface of the petals thus when they are closed they become inconspicuous. They are pollinated by small moths and butterflies. Some authorities also note that the flowers open only between about 8 am. and 3 pm. (Greenwich Mean Time) in bright weather.

Warning – scarlet pimpernel is potentially poisonous. Some evidence suggests that the plant can cause anaemia, depression, loss of appetite and diarrhoea. Dermatitis can be caused by the leaves. The plant is potentially poisonous for animals and may be fatal for dogs and horses.

Arvensis means 'of or growing in cultivated fields or land'.

The superstitious in Europe believed that if you held the flower in your hand you would experience second sight. There were those who were also convinced that the plant offered protection from witchcraft.

Then in the 20th Century the flower gained a different kind of recognition as the identification buttonhole of the hero in the *Scarlet Pimpernel* novels written by the Hungarian-born, British novelist and playwright, Baroness Emmuska Orczy (1865-1947).

Scarlet pimpernel is a natural weather oracle as it closes at approaching bad weather.

It also had culinary use once as the leaves were eaten in salads especially, some authorities

note, in Germany and France.

Birds enjoy the seeds.

Medicinally, from the early Greek era to the 19th Century the plant was highly respected almost as a panacea. European herbalists used to recommend it for treating depression after liver disease, fluid retention, epilepsy, eye diseases, mental illness, fever, contagious diseases generally, tuberculosis, hydrophobia, gout, rheumatic conditions and snake bites. Scarlet pimpernel was considered admirable for helping to draw thorns and splinters out of the flesh, and was also used to ease toothache. Additionally it was the prime ingredient in a remedy for freckles that was known as 'pimpernel water' and it was included in cosmetic preparations, particularly by the French, for treating rough, deformed or discoloured skin. Although today in the Nile Valley it can be used as a local remedy for treating gallstones and some respiratory ailments generally, it is no longer favoured in folk medicine because of its poisonous potential – although some evidence is understood to indicate that it could possibly be of benefit in treatments for some brain diseases and melancholia.

Scarlet pimpernel is used commercially in homoeopathic treatments.

It is the birthday flower for 19th August.