

Aquilegia vulgaris

[Synonyms : *Aquilegia baicalensis*, *Aquilegia clematiflora*, *Aquilegia longisepala*, *Aquilegia nevadensis*, *Aquilegia stellata*]

COLUMBINE is a perennial. Native to Europe (including Britain) it has short-spurred violet-blue flowers that normally have a hay-like scent.

It is also known as *Akelei* (Dutch, German), *Akileija* (Finnish), *Akleja* (Swedish), *Ancolie commune* (French), *Ancolie vulgaire* (French), *Aquilegia*, *Baby's shoes*, *Bachelor's buttons*, *Blodau'r Sipsi* (Welsh), *Blue bells*, *Blue starry*, *Bonnets*, *Boots and shoes*, *Cains and Abels*, *Capon's feather*, *Common columbine*, *Culverkeys*, *Culverwort*, *Dolly's bonnets*, *Dolly's shoes*, *Doves at the fountain*, *Dove's foot*, *Doves in the ark*, *Dove's plant*, *Doves round a dish*, *European columbine*, *European crowfoot*, *Folly's flower*, *Fool's cap*, *Garden columbine*, *Gemeine Akelei* (German), *Gewöhnliche Akelei* (German), *Grandmother's bonnet*, *Granny-bonnets*, *Granny hoods*, *Granny-jump-out-of-bed*, *Granny's bonnet*, *Granny's nightcap*, *Hawkfoot*, *Hen and chickens*, *Herbe d'Iliaôn* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Lady's petticoat*, *Lady's shoes*, *Lady's slippers*, *Lion's herb*, *Naked woman's foot*, *Nightcaps*, *Noah's ark*, *Old lady's bonnet*, *Old maid's basket*, *Old woman's bonnet*, *Old woman's nightcap*, *Orlíček obecný* (Czech), *Orlíček obyčajný* (Slovak), *Pigeon flower*, *Pigeon foot*, *Purple crowfoot*, *Rags and tatters*, *Shoe and stockings*, *Skull caps*, *Snapdragon*, *Soldier's buttons*, *Sow-wort*, *Thimbles*, *Two faces under a hat*, *Vièrs garçons* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Widow's weeds*, *Wild columbine of Europe*, and *Wilde akelei* (Dutch); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'anxious and trembling' (red), *desertion*, *folly*, *inconstancy*, *resolution* (purple), and *resolved to win* (purple).

The flowers are pollinated by long-tongued bumble-bees.

Warning – the whole plant is potentially poisonous and the seeds can be fatal for children. It should only be used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.

Columbine is subject to preservation orders in the wild.

Vulgaris means 'common'.

The common English name Columbine comes from a Latin word for 'dove' (*columba*) as the flower was thought to suggest the shape of a group of doves drinking.

One very old piece of lore contends that in the Spring the flowers were eaten by lions to give them strength. With this in mind the English barber-surgeon and herbalist (the latter as a charlatan for many authorities) John Gerard (1545-1612) referred to the plant as *herba leonis*. Many also thought that the courage of a lion was assured if columbine was rubbed over the hands. At one time columbine was also believed to be able to protect young couples from witches.

In 17th Century England a lady who was given columbine was likely to be saddled with a reputation for having flexible morals. To dream of columbine is said to suggest a happy adventure.

The flower has been used in English heraldry and has appeared in the badge of both the royal House of Lancaster and that of the Derby family.

Some authorities declare that columbine was the first species of its genus to be cultivated as long ago possibly as the 13th Century. It has been grown in English gardens for over 300

years and the original violet-blue or white flowers are now joined by many other colours in the cultivated forms *Alba plena* and *Flore pleno*. Columbine was introduced to North America by the early settlers and from both forms and related species native to that Continent many of the multi-coloured garden hybrids now seen there were developed. Until the recent recognition of its potentially poisonous nature columbine was valued for medicinal and astringent properties. Columbine is understood to have been a particular favourite of St. Hildegarde (1098-1179) who was the famous German Abbess of Rupertsberg, near Bingen. She recommended it especially for treating swollen glands and mentioned it in her works on medicine and natural history. It was once used as a treatment for scurvy and also for sore throats, ulcers, boils, measles, smallpox, fluid retention and jaundice, and it was used by homoeopaths for treating nervous conditions. Columbine seeds in wine were once employed to induce childbirth. It is the birthday flower for 1st April.