

*Arum maculatum*

[Synonyms : *Arum idaeum*, *Arum maculatum* var. *karpatii*, *Arum malyi*, *Arum orientale* subsp. *amoenum*, *Arum pyrenaicum*, *Arum trapezuntinum*, *Arum vulgare*, *Arum zeleebori*]

**LORDS-AND-LADIES** is a perennial. Native to Europe it has a large pointed, greenish leaf-like spathe framing a club-shaped spike (spadix) of many minute, dark purple or yellowish flowers.

It is also known as Aaron, Adam and Eve, Adder's food, Adder's meat, Adder's root, Adder's tongue, Angels and devils, *Aro comune* (Italian), Aron, *Árón plamatý* (Czech), *Áron skvrnitý* (Czech), *Áron škvřnitý* (Slovak), *Aronstab* (German), *Aronswurz* (German), Arum, Arum lily, *Arum tacheté* (French), Babe-in-the-cradle, Bloody fingers, Bloody man's finger, Bobbin and Joan, Bobbing Jane, Bobbins, *Bonnet de grand prêtre* (French), Boys and girls, Brown dragons, Bullocks, Bulls, Bulls and cows, Bulls and wheys, Calfsfoot, *Chou poivre* (French), Cobbler's thumb, Cocky baby, *Couaille de prêtre* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Cows and bulls, Cows and calves, Cow's parsnip, Cuckoo cock, Cuckoo-flower, Cuckoopint, Cuckoopintle, Cuckoo point, Cypress powder, Dead man's fingers, Devils and angels, Devils, Devil's man and woman, Dog bobbins, Dog cocks, Dog's dibble, Dog's dick, Dog's spear, Dog's tassel, Dragon root, English passionflower, Fairies, *Fläckig munkhätta* (Swedish), *Fleckenzehrurz* (German), Flycatcher, Friar's cowl, Frog's meat, Gagle, *Gefleckter Aronstab* (German), *Gemeiner Aronstab* (German), Gentleman's finger, Gentlemen and ladies, Gentlemen's and ladies' fingers, Gethsemane, *Gevlekte aronskelk* (Dutch), *Giglio d'oro* (Italian), *Gouet tacheté* (French), Great dragon, Hobble-gobbles, Jack in the box, Jack in the green, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Kings and queens, Kitty-come-down-the-lane, Kitty-come-down-the-lane-jump-up-and-kiss-me, Knights and ladies, Ladies and gentlemen, Ladies' lords, Lady's finger, Lady's keys, Lady's slipper, Ladysmock, Lamb-in-a-pulpit, Lamb's lakens, Lily, Lily grass, Long purples, Lords-and-ladies cuckoopint, Lords' and ladies' fingers, Mandrake, Man-in-the-pulpit, Men and women, Moll of the woods, *Munkhätta* (Swedish), *Munkinhuppu* (Finnish), Naked ladies, Nightingale, Old man's pulpit, Oxberry, *Pain de lièvre* (French), Parisian cypress, Parson and clerk, Parson-in-his-smock, Parson in the pulpit, Parson's billycock, Passion flower, *Pidyn y Gog* (Welsh), *Piéd de veau* (French), Pintle, *Pitouais* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Plettet Ingefær* (Danish), Poison fingers, Poison root, Pokers, Portland arrowroot, Portland sago, Portland starch plant, Preacher-in-the-pulpit, Priesties, Priest-in-the-pulpit, Priest's hood, Priest's pilly, Priest's pintle, Quaker, Ramp, Ram's horn, Ramson, Red-hot poker, Schoolmaster, Silly lovers, Small dragon, Snake's food, Snake's meat, Snake's victuals, Soldiers, Soldiers and angels, Soldiers and sailors, Stallions, Stallions and mares, Standing gusses, Starch flower, Starch plant, Starchwort, Starchwort arum, Sucky calves, Sweethearts, Toad's meat, *Vanlig munkhätta* (Swedish), Wake robin, White and red, Wild arum, Wild lily, and Willy lily; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ardour, and zeal.

The stench generated by the flower 'spike' and any bruised leaves lures certain pollinating small flies and dung beetles which are temporarily trapped inside (as many as 4,000 tiny gnats have been counted) – authorities say until the flowers ripen or until nightfall when the encircling spathe loosens.

Warning – all parts of the fresh plant are poisonous particularly the berries. If taken internally it can cause oral inflammation, red rashes, severe gastroenteritis, abdominal pain, purging, vomiting, weakness, symptoms of shock, irregular heartbeat, collapse, coma and death. The root starch can be a skin irritant. It can be fatally poisonous for some animals which normally avoid it.

*Maculatum* is derived from Latin *macula* (spot, stain) meaning ‘spotted or blotched’.

Lords-and-ladies can be seen in old tapestries and paintings especially as the familiar dense spike of bright red berries under their hooding bract or leaf. In this form apparently its suggestive appearance symbolized copulation which is also reflected in so many of the common names. One of the most common English names (and according to some authorities the earliest) Cuckoopint is believed to be derived from the Anglo Saxon word for ‘lively’ *cucu* and ‘penis’ or ‘pint’ *pintle*.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek physician, Dioscorides, was not alone in putting forward the idea that the plant was an aphrodisiac. This obviously increased its popularity.

In 16<sup>th</sup> Century England however it was known particularly as Starchwort and the powdered root (despite it being the reason for blistered hands) was used to starch Elizabethan ruffs that could be as much as 3 feet deep. In France this same abrasive starch (which was also called Cypress powder or Parisian cypress) was even used by fashionable Parisian ladies as a skin cosmetic – while in Italy it was applied to the face as a treatment for freckles. In Switzerland juice extracted from fresh roots was used as an alternative to soap.

Apart from the acrid starch the tuberous roots (when appropriately processed) yield a wholesome food that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was considered to be an alternative for arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*). It was known in Britain as Portland arrowroot or Portland sago – names that are understood to have arisen because London dealers found so much of it reaching them from the Portland area on the English South coast. Portland sago was not only prepared like salep but was also used to make bread. This practice eventually fell into disuse and towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century demand had petered out.

Several legends revolve around lords-and-ladies. One that was attributed by the English barber-surgeon and herbalist (a charlatan for many authorities) John Gerard (1545-1612) to Aristotle (384-322 BC) the Greek philosopher, is said to have led to the belief that the plant had the power to restore life. The story claimed that some time between 400-300 BC bears (half-starved during their hibernation) had completely revived after eating the plant. Another in the Christian tradition which was believed to be the reason behind the plant receiving the name ‘Gethsemane’ describes how lords-and-ladies had been growing at the foot of the Cross on which Jesus was crucified. Drops of blood fell on the leaves which thus explained their speckled marking.

In England its sap was one of the charms rubbed on the reapers’ blades to keep them sharp during the harvest.

For some young men lords-and-ladies was once considered to be a love charm and if a piece was put inside the shoe while saying

I place you in my shoe  
Let all the girls be drawn to you

it would have the power to lure the prettiest girl at a dance.

All of this is likely to have contributed ultimately to the vast quantities of the processed tubers sold in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

For many animals the plant is poisonous and unless they are starving they avoid it. However Gilbert White (1720-1793) the celebrated Hampshire clergyman and naturalist, noted in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that several birds (especially pheasants) ate the berries and in severe Winters thrushes would claw up the roots and eat those. More recent observations have

also been reported by naturalists and these indicate that jays will snap off the shielding petal-like leaf (the spathe) just before it is ready to unfurl, extract the then starchy, central spike and return to their nests to feed it to their demanding young.

Medicinally, lords-and-ladies was used by herbalists to treat ulcers, wounds and skin complaints, as well as being an antidote for poison and a remedy for plague. It was also recommended for treating loss of appetite, and coughs.