

Bellis perennis

[Synonyms : *Bellis minor sylvestris simplex*]

DAISY is a perennial. Native to Europe and Asia Minor, it has small bright yellow centred, white flowers.

It is also known as Apes on horseback, *Ausdauerndes Gänseblümchen* (German), Baby's pet, Bairnwort, Baiyan-flower, Banewort, Banwood, Banwort, Banwurt, *Beliso plurjara* (Esperanto), *Bellis* (Swedish), Bennergowan, Bennert, *Berbiette* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Bessy-bairnwort, Bessy banwood, Billy button, Bone-flower, Bonewort, Brinswort, Bruisewort, Cat posy, Childing daisy, *Chudobka* (Czech), Common daisy, Common English daisy, Common European daisy, Curl-doddy, *Daugiametė saulutė* (Lithuanian), Day's eye, Dog daisy, English daisy, English lawn daisy, European daisy, Ewe-gan, Ewe-gollan, Ewe-gowan, Eye gowan, Eye of day, Flower of Spring, *Gänseblümchen* (German), Garden daisy, Golland, Goose flower, Gowan, Gowlan, Gracy daisy, Hen-and-chickens daisy, Hen-and-chickens, Herb Margaret, Innocent, *Kaunokainen* (Finnish), *Koyungözü* (Turkish), Lawn daisy, Little open star, Little star, *Llygad y dydd* (Welsh), Lockin gowan, *Madeliefje* (Dutch), March daisy, Margaret, *Margarita* (Spanish), Marguerite, Mary gowlan, *Massliebchen* (German), May gowan, Measure of love, *Mehrjähriges Gänseblümchen* (German), *Mèrgots* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Miss modesty, Mountain daisy, Nails, Noon flower, Open eye, *Pâquerette* (French), *Pâquerette vivace* (French), *Petite marguerite* (French), *Sedmikráska obecná* (Czech), *Sedmikráska obyčejná* (Slovak), Shepherd's daisy, Silver pennies, Star, *Stokrotka pospolita* (Polish), *Tusensköna* (Swedish), *Tusindfryd* (Danish), Twelve disciples, White frills, and Wild daisy; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of adoration, beauty and innocence, fidelity, innocence, 'I share your sentiments', and virginity.

The flowers close at night and in damp weather.

Perennis means 'perennial'.

The Anglo-Saxons called the flower *deages eage* (which means 'day's eye' because it opens its petals in daylight and closes them at night) – and Daisy is derived from this name.

Apothecaries and physicians of long ago called the daisy *consolida minor* as it was claimed it could heal or 'consolidate' wounds.

Most of the legends and lore associated with daisy refer to innocence and love. The flower was dedicated to the goddess of love (Aphrodite for the Greeks and Venus for the Romans) and also to Freyja, the northern European Norse goddess of love and the Spring. In Roman myth Belides, the meadow nymph, transformed herself into a daisy to escape the amorous advances of Vertumnus, god of the orchards. While the Celts believed that daisies were the spirits of children who died at birth.

More recently Christian monks dedicated the daisy to St. Margaret (20th July) and the flower was once called herb Margaret. Christian legend has it that the daisy sprang from Mary's tears as she fled to Egypt, and it is an emblem of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Christian medieval art adopted it as a symbol of the Christ child's innocence. Even Chaucer (c.1345-1400) the English poet, relies on this tradition in *Legende of Goode Women* when he changed Queen Alceste into a daisy because of her virtues, and he also described the

flower thus

Men by reason well it calle may
The daisie, or else the eye of day,
The empresse and the flowre of flowres all.

Daisies have certainly made their mark in literature. They are mentioned in several of the plays of the famous English dramatist and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) not least *Cymbeline* when the General of the Roman forces, Caius Lucius, directs the burial of the Queen's son, Cloten

..... let us
Find out the prettiest daisied plot we can,
And make him with our pikes and partisans
A grave;

Many poets have praised the little flowers and of these perhaps the following are best known. The English rector's son, William Cowper (1731-1800) described childhood practices – which continue to this day.

In the spring and play-time of the year
.....the little ones, a sportive team,
Gather king-cups in the yellow mead,
And prank their hair with daisies.

While his peer, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote a delightful poem entitled *An Address to the Daisy*. This begins

With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Sweet Daisy! oft I talk to thee
For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming Commonplace
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace
Which love makes for thee!

The daisy appeared in some of the heraldic devices and in England it was particularly associated with Henry VI's wife, Margaret of Anjou (1429-82). Following their marriage in 1455 the courtiers wore daisies on their clothing as a welcome to her, and some of the royal silver of that period had the flower engraved upon it.

Various superstitions included the belief that the roots could stunt human growth, but that if it was carried on one's person it was a safeguard against accidents and illness. Others held that failure to tread on the first daisy seen in Spring presages death for you or a loved one within the year. Alternatively stepping on a daisy was unlucky, that uprooting a daisy threatened your children's prosperity, and that when you can place your foot over three daisies (the number varied for different localities in England) Spring had arrived.

Superstitions regarding the daisy were not confined to effects on human beings. Unweaned puppies were unlikely to survive if the flowers were fed to them, on the other hand they would grow bigger if fed with the liquid made from boiling the roots in milk.

To dream of daisies is said to indicate a birth, and various rituals existed around daisies by which a future loved-one could be foretold. One of its old common names Measure of love comes from the practice of reciting
he loves me, he loves me not
as the daisy's petals are pulled off.

Some traditional superstitions persist today. Folklore in Germany claims that the wearer of a dried daisy, which has been picked between 12 noon and 1 pm, will attract success in any new undertaking.

The daisy's bitter flavour is such that insects and cattle actively avoid the plants. Yet in some

countries the leaves were used locally by human beings as a vegetable flavouring. In North America the daisy has been grown as a bedding plant and as an addition to window boxes. Before this however it had already been absorbed into the medicinal chest familiar to the North American Iroquois Indian tribe who used the plant in infusion to treat some stomach disorders.

Medicinally, the plant was used by herbalists to treat liver ailments, fever, wounded breasts and swollen testicles, and was applied externally as a remedy for fresh wounds. During the 16th Century Elizabethan era in England herbalists used the plant's acrid juice to treat gout and rheumatism, and they also recommended that it be sniffed up the nose as a cure for migraine. Today a daisy oil is used in homoeopathic treatments.

The daisy is considered to be July's ambassador.
It is the birthday flower for 17th April, and is also associated with the whole of that month.