

Calendula officinalis

[Synonyms : *Calendula officinalis* var. *prolifera*, *Caltha officinalis*]

POT MARIGOLD is an annual (rarely biennial or perennial). Possibly native to the Mediterranean it has daisy-like, bright yellow or orange flowers.

It is also known as African daisy, Bull's eyes, Calendula (English, Italian), *Claveton* (Spanish), Common marigold, Common marygold, *Fiore d'ogni mese* (Italian), *Flameniquillo* (Spanish), *Fleur de tous les mois* (French), Garden marigold, Garden marygold, *Garten-Ringelblume* (German), Gold, Gold-bloom, Goldings, Gold ruddes, Golds, *Goudsbloemen* (Dutch), Holigold, Husbandman's dial, Jackanapes-on-horseback, Jack-on-horseback, *Kalendulo oficina* (Esperanto), *Kehäkukka* (Finnish), *Marguerite* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Marigold, Marybud, Marygold, Mary gowles, Mary's gold, May bud, *Melyn Mair* (Welsh), *Měsíček lékařský* (Czech), *Nechtík lékarský* (Slovak), *Oculus Christi* (Italian), *Ringblomma* (Swedish), *Ringelblume* (German), Rod's gold, Ruddes, Ruddles, Scotch marigold, *Solis sponsa* (Italian), *Souci* (French), *Souci des champs* (French), *Soucique* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Souvenir, Summer's bride, Yellow goldes, and *Zergul* (Hindi, Punjabi); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'cruelty in love', despair, grief, inquietude, jealous lover, joy, pain, 'sympathy and lightened cares' (with poppies), 'thread of life's joys and sorrows' (with other flowers) and uneasiness.

The petals will give a saffron colour and a mild tangy (not saffron, *Crocus sativus*) slightly sweet taste, with a salty aftertaste and a nondescript, slightly sweet smell. Only the deep orange flowers have medicinal use.

Warning – handling the plant can cause dermatitis. Some people can also experience allergic reactions from the plant ie. asthma, hay fever, runny nose, peeling or bleeding lips.

Pot marigold is a member of a different genus to that of the African, French and Inca marigolds (see *Tagetes*).

Officinalis means 'of the shop (usually the apothecary's or herbalist's)'. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name.

Initially the common English name Marigold had nothing whatsoever to do with the Virgin Mary. It was a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon name for the marsh-marigold *merso-meargealla* (*Caltha palustris*). The religious association was made later and in England in the late 17th Century the flower was also connected with Queen Mary II (1662-1694) wife of William of Orange.

The ancient Egyptians used the pot marigold for rejuvenation, the Hindus chose it for the decoration of temple altars and as garlands draped around the necks of their gods, and the Persians and ancient Greeks used it for garnishing and flavouring food. Jumping to relatively more recent times, in the American Civil War in the 1860s the pot marigold saw service in the treatment of open wounds.

For a very long time in Germany and England many people believed that they would stay in good health during the Winter if they ate pot marigold flowers during the Summer and Autumn. 16th Century European spice sellers, particularly those in the Netherlands, displayed barrels filled with the dried petals and these found their way into drinks and

soups. Pot marigold used once to be a traditional yellow colouring for cheeses. Fields of them are still grown in Europe eg. Denmark, not only for these purposes and flavouring, but also as cattle fodder. The petals are still used today as food colouring (a less expensive alternative to saffron (*Crocus sativus*)) and as flavouring in soups, stews, butters and cheeses. The fresh leaves can be added to salads, which can also be decorated with the petals.

In Europe pot marigolds were not only considered to be very lucky inside the home but to provide a protective influence. They also formed part of a love salve which enabled anyone who wished, so it was said, to dream of their future spouse. This ritual, which involved anointing the body in specified places and repeating an incantation three times before sleeping, had to be carried out on the Feast Day of St. Luke (18th October) who was considered to be sympathetic to lovers. At one time English country-folk believed that provided you were sinless and picked the pot marigold under certain positions of the planets and the moon (while saying three Pater Nosters and three Aves) the flower would bring you a vision of anybody who had robbed you. To dream of the pot marigold is said to indicate doing well in life.

For Christians the flower is dedicated to Lady Day (25th March).

Pot marigolds are sensitive to temperature and humidity and thus can be an indicator in weather forecasting as the opening and closing flowers can herald respectively a fine or wet day.

Pot marigold is often an ingredient in cosmetic creams and lotions, particularly those for sensitive skins. The flowers, which can give a bright yellow dye, are also used in hair rinses as they can enhance golden highlights – and in the past they used to be accepted as a yellow hair dye. This last practice was referred to by the ‘father of British botany’, William Turner (c. 1510-1568) in *A New Herball*. His perceived disapproval, as he voiced the comment that such women who used the dye were

not being content with the natural colour which God hath given them
may well (for some authorities) be a reflection of his role as a Dean of Wells in the English West Country.

Pot marigold seems to have been especially popular as a literary ingredient until the middle of the 17th Century under its names such as Golds. There is however occasional debate among authorities on whether this species is meant (or another) when the context is unclear. Authorities seem to agree that the famous English bard, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was referring to this species when he mentioned pot marigold in his plays.

These include that in this extract from the Song in the 2nd Act of *Cymbeline*

And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes;

and the flower’s description in *The Winter’s Tale*

.....savory, marjoram;
The marigold, that goes to bed wi’ the sun,
And with him rises weeping; there are flowers
Of middle summer, and, I think, they are given
To men of middle age.

His peer, George Wither (1588-1667) in *The Marigold* went into far greater detail

When with a serious musing I behold
The grateful and obsequious marigold,
How dully every morning she displays
Her open breast when Phoebus spreads his rays;
How she observes him in his daily walk,

Today the flowers are used commercially by the cosmetics and toiletry industries in creams and soaps. The essential oil is used by the perfumery industry to add a rather sharp tang to creations – and the plant is an ingredient in proprietary medicines. Research is also being

undertaken into the viability of growing the flowers in greenhouses on a commercial scale for the ornamental pot plant market.

Medicinally, herbalists recommended the plant for treating catarrh, headaches, sore eyes, wounds, wasp and bee stings, warts and toothache. It also provided a remedy for soothing swellings, and easing ulcers and varicose veins. It was used as a treatment for smallpox and measles, and as a remedy for anaemia, fever, jaundice and skin irritation. Today pot marigold can be employed in infusion for treating internal ulcers, painful periods and stomach disorders, and externally it offers a remedy as an ointment or lotion for treating burns, scalds, nappy rash, sore nipples, scars, cuts and bruises.

It is the birthday flower for 15th January, and is also associated with October.