

Caltha palustris

[Synonyms : *Caltha alpestris*, *Caltha arctica*, *Caltha artica*, *Caltha asarifolia*, *Caltha cornuta*, *Caltha laeta*, *Caltha minor*, *Caltha palustris* var. *alpina*, *Caltha palustris* var. *arctica*, *Caltha palustris* var. *asarifolia*, *Caltha palustris* var. *flabellifolia*, *Caltha palustris* subsp. *minor*, *Caltha palustris* var. *radicans*, *Caltha parnassifolia*, *Caltha polypetala*, *Caltha radicans*]

MARSH-MARIGOLD is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to temperate Europe and north-eastern North America, it has glossy golden flowers each with up to 100 yellow stamens.

It is also known as American cowslip, Bachelor's button, Bee's rest, Big buttercup, Billy buttons, *Blatouch bahenni* (Czech), Bobby's buttons, Bog daisy, Boots, Bouts, Bright meadow, Bull buttercup, Bull-cup, Bulldogs, Bull-flower, Bull-rushes, Bull's eyes, Butterbleb, Buttercup, Butterflower, Capers, Carlicup, Chirms, Claut, Colt's foot, Colt's root, Cow-lily, Cow-crane, Cowslip, Cowslop, Crazy, Crazy Betsey, Crazy Beth, Crazy lilies, Crow cranes, Crowflower, Crowfoot, Cup and saucers, Dalecup, *Dotterbloem* (Dutch), *Dotterblume* (German), Downscwoobs, Drunkard, *Eng-Kabbeleje* (Danish), English marigold, Fiddle, Fire o' gold, *Gewone dotterbloem* (Dutch), Gilcup, Guilty-cup, Gipsy's money, Golden cup, Golden knob, Golden kingcup, Goldicup, Goldilocks, Goldings, Golds, *Gold y Gors* (Welsh), Golland, Gollins, Gools, Gowan, Grandfather's buttons, Great bitter flower, Ground ivy, Halcup, Horse blobs, Horse buttercup, Horse hooves, John georges, Johnny cranes, *Kabbeleka* (Swedish), *Kabbleka* (Swedish), *Kalto marĉa* (Esperanto), *Kalvleka* (Swedish), King cup, King's cob, King's cup, Leopard's foot, Livers, *Mamiri* (Punjabi), Mare-blobs, Marigold, Marsh lilies, Marybout, Mary bud, Mary's gold, May blobs, May blubs, May bubbles, Mayflower, Meadow bouts, Meadowbright, Meadow buttercup, Meadow cowslip, Meadow-gowan, Meadow rout, Mollblob, Mollyblobs, Monkey bells, Old man's buttons, Palsywort, Policeman's buttons, Pollyblobs, *Populage* (French), *Populage des marais* (French), Publicans, Publicans-and-sinners, Publican's cloak, *Rantarentukka* (Finnish), *Rentukka* (Finnish), Soldier's buttons, Solsequia, *Souci d'eau* (French), Sponsa solis, Spring cowslip, *Sumpff-Dotterblume* (German), Swamp globeflower, Verrucaria, Water babies, Water blabs, Water blebs, Water blobs, Water blubbers, Water boot, Water bowls, Water-bubbles, Water buttercup, Water caltrops, Water cowslip, Water dragon, Water fennel, Water geordies, Water goggles, Water golland, Water gowan, Water lily, Water starwort, Wildfire, Yellow blob, Yellow boots, Yellow crazies, Yellow gowlan, Yellow marshmarigold, and *Záružlie močairne* (Slovak); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of brilliancy, childishness, 'desire for riches', divine beauty, ingratitude, 'I wish I were rich', and 'you are my divinity'.

Both the pollen and the nectar attract insects, and the seeds are distributed during rain or flooding.

Warning – the whole plant is potentially poisonous, especially when flowering, because of its sap. The juice can cause serious swelling and inflammation, and taken internally can cause oral blistering, nausea, stomachache, vomiting and diarrhoea. It should only be consumed if cooked or dried. Medicinal use should be under the supervision of a

qualified practitioner. The fresh plant can be poisonous (even fatal) for some animals, many of which avoid it because of its sharp taste.

Palustris is derived from Latin *palus* (bog, marsh) meaning ‘of or from bogs, swamps or marshes’.

The usual common names in England are Marsh-marigold and King cup, while American custom chooses Cowslip.

In England although some believed it was unlucky to take marsh-marigold indoors before 1st May others maintained a tradition whereby the flowers were picked on the afternoon of 30th April and one was dropped through the letterbox of each house before nightfall as a protection against evil fairies on the night of May Day Eve. Similarly cattle were garlanded with marsh marigolds for protection on that Eve as they were believed to be especially vulnerable then. Although many households banished the flowers from the building before the start of May Day, following it the flowers were permitted inside particularly as they could offer some protection from lightning.

On religious festivals in the Middle Ages Christian churches were decorated with marsh-marigold, as it represented the Virgin Mary, as did other marigolds to which this species is not related. Marsh-marigold also featured on May Day (and still does in some parts of Ireland today) when it was made into garlands and was strewn before cottage doors.

Marsh-marigold is not overlooked in literature. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the famous English playwright and poet, mentioned the flowers in *Cymbeline*. (King Cymbeline’s foolish son, Cloten, hopes to beguile his married half-sister, Imogen, with an early morning song from the Court musicians.

Hark! hark! the lark at heaven’s gate sings,
.....;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes;
With every thing that pretty is,
My lady sweet, arise;
Arise, arise!

A couple of centuries later the English poet, Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) wrote in *The May Queen*

The wild marsh marigold shines like fire in swamps and hollows
gray.

The Ainu people of Japan eat the roots. In Europe and North America the young Spring leaves have long been cooked and eaten like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), and the flower buds have been pickled and used like capers (*Capparis spinosa*). The juice has been used in the past to colour butter. Marsh marigold was certainly a familiar food to the North American Chippewa, Iroquois, Abnaki, Mohican and Menominee Indian tribes, and the latter may eventually have known the plant under the name ‘cowslip’. The early North American settlers called them ‘cowslip greens’) and also cooked them as a vegetable despite the fact that many have recognized the plant’s poisonous potential. (The Abnaki Indians also ate the seeds.) Some authorities note that in England Queen Victoria is alleged to have enjoyed boiled mutton with a caper sauce-with-a-difference – the traditional capers are said to have been replaced by marsh-marigold buds.

A non-permanent yellow dye can be obtained from the petals.

It is not often that you come across antidotes for love charms but, according to records, the Iroquois Indians seem to have found one in the marsh-marigold. They gave such victims an infusion of smashed roots that made them very sick.

Although the plant’s poisonous qualities seems to have been acknowledged in some tribes such as the Abnaki, several North American Indian tribes developed medicinal uses for it,

especially the Chippewa. They not only used it to treat colds, fluid retention and some female disorders but also applied it in poultices to sores. Some of the Alaskan Inuits also took a leaf infusion as a laxative.

Medicinally, Western herbalists used to prescribe an infusion of flowers for treating epilepsy, and a tincture of the flowering plant for anaemia. It was also used for curing warts. In the Himalayas the roots are used locally in treatments for eye ailments. Apparently marsh-marigold can be used today as a tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) substitute in commercial treatments for giving up smoking.

It is the birthday flower for 10th March.