

Campanula rapunculus

[Synonyms : *Campanula coarctata*, *Campanula hyrcania*, *Campanula lambertiana*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *brachyloba*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *grandiflora*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *hirsutissima*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *hirta*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *lambertiana*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *spiciformis*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *strigulosa*, *Campanula rapunculus* var. *verruculosa*, *Campanula verruculosa*, *Neocodon lambertianus*, *Rapunculus verus*]

RAMPION BELLFLOWER is an annual, biennial or perennial. Found in Asia (particularly Siberia) and in North Africa and Europe, it has small, reddish-purple or blue (occasionally white) flowers.

It is also known as Biennial rampion, *Campanule gantelée* (French), *Clychlys Erfin* (Welsh), Creeping bellflower, *Glockenblume* (German), *Kauriinkello* (Finnish), *Raiponce* (French), Rampion, Ramps, *Raperonzolo* (Italian), *Raponchigo* (Spanish), *Rapunkelklocka* (Swedish), *Rapunkolo* (Slovak), *Rapunzel-Glockenblume* (German), *Zvonček* (Slovak), *Zvonek hlíznať* (Czech), and *Zvonek řepka* (Czech).

In Britain at least rampion bellflower is considered to be endangered in the wild.

Rapunculus is derived from Latin *rapa* (turnip) meaning ‘little turnip’ with reference to the roots.

Over the centuries many European authors have referred to rampion bellflower including William Shakespeare (1564-1616) the English playwright, poet and actor. His *Falstaff* refers to it by a slang name (which, according to authorities, suggests that it must have been growing for some time in Britain by the mid-16th Century for his audiences to appreciate the familiar allusion). In Italy the thread of a very old Calabrian tale depends upon a maiden pulling up a rampion bellflower to reveal a staircase leading to a palace in the heart of the earth. While in Germany in the 19th Century the folklorists, the brothers Grimm (Jacob, 1785-1863 and Wilhelm, 1786-1859) wrote a story based upon the theft of rampion bellflowers from a magician’s garden.

Although rampion bellflower root was long a familiar food in Britain (where it was eaten raw or cooked) in France, Germany and Italy probably more than any other countries in Europe rampion bellflowers were actively cultivated for centuries and the roots were enjoyed as parsnips (*Pastinaca sativa*) are today. Apart from boiling, roasting or pickling the roots, the young shoots were also consumed after they had been cooked like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*), and the leaves provided a salad ingredient.

Some old records suggest a cosmetic use. It appears that distilled water made from the plant was believed to be good for the complexion.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend a decoction of root to treat various oral ailments.