

Cardamine pratensis

[Synonyms : *Cardamine dentata*, *Cardamine nymanii*, *Cardamine palustris*, *Cardamine pratense*, *Dracamine pratensis*]

LADY'S SMOCK is a perennial. Native to temperate northern Europe and North America, it has lilac or white flowers.

It is also known as *Äkta ängsbräsma* (Swedish), *Ängsbräsma* (Swedish), *Ängskrasse* (Swedish), Apple pie, Bird's eye, *Billeri* (Italian), Bittercress, *Blodyn y Gog* (Welsh), Bog flower, Bog spink, Bonny bird eye, Bread and milk, *Cardamina* (Spanish), *Cardamine des prés* (French), Carsons, Coco plant, *Coucou* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Cuckoo, Cuckoo bread, Cuckoo buds, Cuckoo cress, Cuckoo-flower, Cuckoo pint, Cuckoo pintle, Cuckoo spice, Cuckoo spit, Cuckoo's shoes and stockings, *Engkarse* (Danish), Fairy flower, Headache, *Herbejkreso* (Esperanto), *Himmelfahrtsblume* (German), *Hydyf* (Welsh), *Kälberschwanz* (German), *Käseblume* (German), Lady's cloak, Lady's flock, Lady's flower, Lady's glove, Lady's mantle, Lady's milk sile, Lady's pride, Lamb's lakens, Laylocks, Lonesome lady, Lucy locket, *Luhtalitukka* (Finnish), Mayblob, Mayflower, Meadow bittercress, Meadow cress, Meadow flower, Meadow pink, Meadow kerses, Milkies, Milk girls, Milk maids, Milk sile, Milky maidens, Moll-blobs, My lady's smock, Naked ladies, Nightingale flower, *Niittyluhtakaali* (Finnish), Our Lady's smock, Paigle, Pick-folly, Pigeon's eye, Pig's eye, Pink, *Pinksterbloem* (Dutch), *Regenblume* (German), *Řeřišnice luční* (Czech), Shoes and stockings, Smell smock, Smick-smock, Spink, Water cuckoo, Water lily, *Wiesen-Schaumkraut* (German), and *Žerušnica lúčna* (Slovak); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ardour, and paternal error.

The flowers are pollinated by long-tongued hover-flies. On maturity the fruit pods eject their seeds explosively up to a distance of 7 ft.

Pratensis is derived from Latin *pratium* (meadow) meaning 'of or from meadows'.

Long tradition holds the plant to be strongly associated with fairies. If it was woven accidentally into a May Day garland the whole wreath had to be made again, and in some areas (especially in France and Germany) it was considered unlucky to bring lady's smock inside the house for fear a storm would develop and the building would be struck by lightning. Some localities believed that if you picked the flower an adder would bite you before the end of the year.

Lady's smock is dedicated in Christian lore to the Virgin Mary.

The famous English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) mentions lady's smock in the song that concludes *Love's Labour's Lost*.

When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,

Today it is seen less frequently in the wild as fewer meadows are left undrained. As on the stems of ragged-robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) these plants often bear balls of froth too. They are commonly called cuckoo's spit or devil's saliva and are made by the larvae of the

meadow froghopper from the surplus juice they have sucked from the stem. The plant is also food for the orange-tip butterfly.

It can be grown from seed and was once cultivated, sold on market stalls, and used as a salad plant (similar to watercress, *Nasturtium officinale*). It is interesting to note that the leaves of lady's smock contain 5 times the amount of Vitamin C found in a lemon.

Medicinally, herbalists used lady's smock to treat epilepsy, hysteria, scurvy and digestive ailments. The powder used was obtained from roasting the flowers on pewter dishes and was kept in leather stoppered (never cork, for no known reason) bottles.

It is the birthday flower for 21st August.