

### *Carlina acaulis*

[Synonyms : *Carlina acaulis* subsp. *acaulis*, *Carlina alpina*, *Carlina cirsioides*, *Carlina officinalis*, *Carlina subacaulis*, *Chromatolepis acaulis*]

**CARLINE THISTLE** is a biennial or perennial. Native to central and southern Europe (particularly the Alps), it has a creamy-white and purplish-brown centred, and silvery white or whitish-pink edged flower.

It is also known as *Baromètre* (French), *Carlina* (Italian, Spanish), *Carlina bianca* (Italian), *Carline* (French), *Chardon agenté* (French), Charlemagne thistle, Dwarf carline, Dwarf thistle, *Eberwurz* (German), *Grosse Eberwurz* (German), Ground thistle, *Hopeakurho* (Finnish), *Krasovlas bezbyľový* (Slovak), *Pupava bezlodyžná* (Czech), *Silberdistel* (German), *Silvertistel* (Swedish), Smooth carline, Southernwood root, Stemless carline thistle, Stemless thistle, Thistle, Weather thistle, *Wetterdistel* (German), and Wolf's thistle.

The flower head will close at night. It will also close with increased humidity, which often occurs before rain and bad weather.

Warning – large doses can have a purgative effect and can cause vomiting.

This is a protected species in some areas.

*Acaulis* means 'stemless (or nearly so)'.

Its weather forecasting qualities are still relied upon in some rural areas of Germany today and have also led to its French name *Baromètre*. It is for this reason that it can sometimes be seen nailed over cottage doors in some country areas. Many believe it is to Charlemagne (747-814) also known as Carolus Magnus or Charles the Great, that the plant owes its primary common name which was originally Carolina. In German Charlemagne's name translates to Karl der Grosse, or Carl the Great, and it was believed that when an epidemic of plague was devastating his armies an angel showed him how the plant's root could be used as a cure.

Many other legends and folklore (most from the time of the Middle Ages) surround the plant. Not least among these that a man would be able to acquire the sexual strength and potency of a stallion by eating the cooked root. The efficacy of this however relied on ritual planting and preparation, part of which required the thistle to be both planted and harvested at the stroke of midnight under a new moon and to be fertilized with the sperm of a black stallion. Another belief credited the thistle with the ability to enable the person carrying it to absorb strength from other people and from animals. In some places it played a role in magical incantations. Today in the areas of rural Germany referred to earlier there are some people who still believe that if they wear the thistle it can protect them from harm.

A distilled water used to be prepared from the carline thistle and this was much sought after for alleged aphrodisiacal properties.

Authorities believe that Carline thistle became a familiar sight in British gardens from about 1640.

Today the pharmaceutical industry uses the carline thistle in the commercial preparation of some proprietary medicines.

Medicinally, the plant has had some uses in the past (treatment of stomach disorders, worms and fluid retention). In 1918 the root was used to combat a serious influenza epidemic in Spain.