

*Catharanthus roseus*

[Synonyms : *Ammocallis rosea*, *Catharanthus roseus* var. *albus*, *Catharanthus roseus* var. *angustus*, *Catharanthus roseus* var. *nanus*, *Hottonia littoralis*, *Lachnea rosea*, *Lochnera rosea*, *Lochnera rosea* var. *alba*, *Lochnera rosea* var. *angusta*, *Lochnera rosea* var. *flava*, *Pervinca rosea*, *Vinca guilelmi-waldemarii*, *Vinca rosea*, *Vinca rosea* var. *alba*, *Vinca speciosa*]

**MADAGASCAR PERIWINKLE** is a creeping evergreen shrub. Native to Madagascar it has small, maroon centred, rose pink or white flowers.

It is also known as *Ainskati* (Oriya), *Barmasi* (Gujarati), *Billaganneru* (Telugu), *Caca poule* (West Indian), Cape periwinkle, Cayenne jasmine, Dr. Dyette, East Indian periwinkle, Everyday flower, Goat rose, *Katara* (Finnish), *Kataranto roza* (Esperanto), *Kembang sari cina* (Indonesian), *Madagaskar-Immergrün* (German), *Nayantara* (Bengali), Old maid, *Pang pui farang* (Thai), Periwinkle, *Pervenche blanche* (West Indian), Pink periwinkle, Ramgoat rose, *Rattanjot* (Punjabi), Red periwinkle, *Rosensköna* (Swedish), Rose periwinkle, Rosy periwinkle, *Rumput jalang* (Malay), *Sada phul* (Marathi), *Saponaire* (French), *Sudukadu mallikai* (Tamil), *Tahi ayam* (Malay), Twelve o'clock, *Ushamalari* (Malayalam), and West Indian periwinkle.

Alkaloids are extracted from the plant for pharmaceutical use.

Warning – the whole plant is poisonous and has hallucinogenic qualities. In excess it can cause hair loss, muscle deterioration, reduced white blood cell count (affecting the immune system), confusion, tingling skin and burning sensations. Prolonged use can cause liver, kidney and nervous system damage. It is poisonous for cattle.

*Roseus* means 'rose-like, rosy or rose-coloured' with reference to the flowers.

This is one of the few plants that flourishes on the volcanic rocks of the Galapagos Islands.

Authorities believe it likely that the French introduced Madagascar periwinkle to Paris in about 1750. From there it crossed the Channel to England where apparently by 1757 it is said to have been growing in the Chelsea Physic Garden under the auspices of Philip Miller (1691-1771) who was its curator then. At some point it seems that Madagascar periwinkle must have reached Hawaii as there is record that it was a local ingredient there in a potion taken to purify blood.

Medicinally, the leaves have long been used in Madagascar (and in Jamaica similarly) for the treatment of diabetes and skin diseases, and the leaf juice has been applied to wasp stings. In the 1950s research by the University of Western Ontario and the American drug company, Eli Lilly, led to the isolation of over 100 alkaloids that are present in minute quantities, some of which have been identified as valuable in medicinal treatments. These are now part of remedies used for various forms of cancer, including Hodgkin's disease, breast and lung cancers (as well as cancers of other organs) and certain leukaemias. It is amazing to note that it takes 53 tonnes of dry leaves to obtain 100 grammes of one alkaloid for treating leukaemia.