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Chamaemelum nobile

[Synonyms : *Anthemis aurea*, *Anthemis nobilis*, *Anthemis odorata*, *Chamomilla nobilis*, *Matricaria nobilis*, *Ormenis nobilis*]

CHAMOMILE is a mat-forming and invasive, evergreen perennial. Native to southern and western Europe (including Britain except Scotland) and to the Mediterranean, it has a white daisy-like flower head with a solid, raised yellow centre.

It is also known as *Anthemis*, *Baboona* (Urdu), *Babuni-ke-phul* (Hindi), Belgian chamomile, Bowman, Camel, *Camière* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Camil, Cammany, *Camomila de jardín* (Spanish), Camomile, *Camomilla* (Italian), *Camomilla odorosa* (Italian), *Camomilla romana* (Italian), *Camomille* (French), *Camomille noble* (French), *Camomille romaine* (French), Camomine, Camooyne, Camovyne, *Camri* (Welsh), *Canmiéthe* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Cây cúc cam* (Vietnamese), Chamomille, Common chamomile, Common chamomile, Corn chamomile, Corn feverfew, Creeping chamomile, Double chamomile, *Dubbele Kamille* (Dutch), *Edelkamille* (German), English chamomile, English low chamomile, English white chamomile, Garden chamomile, Garden chamomile, Garden dogfennel, *Gartenkamille* (German), Ground apple, *Jalosauramo* (Finnish), *Kamille* (German, Norwegian), *Kamille romersk* (Norwegian), *Kamillkulla* (Swedish), Lawn chamomile, Low chamomile, Low chamomile, *Maagbloempje* (Dutch), *Macela-dourada* (Portuguese), Manzanilla (English, Spanish), *Manzanilla amarga* (Spanish), *Manzanilla fina* (Spanish), *Manzanilla romana* (Spanish), Maythen, Noble chamomile, *Papatye çiç* (Turkish), Pellitory of Spain, Perennial chamomile, Perennial chamomile, Plants' physician, *Pupavka blagorodnaia* (Russian), *Pupavka rimaskaia* (Russian), *Rimaskaia romashka* (Russian), Roman chamomile, Roman chamomile, Roman chamomille, *Romashka blagorodnaia* (Russian), *Romashka rimaskaia* (Russian), *Romerkamille* (Danish), *Romersk kamille* (Danish, Norwegian), *Romersk kamomill* (Swedish), *Römische Kamille* (German), *Römischer Romey* (German), *Roomalainen kamomilla* (Finnish), *Rooman kamomiiru* (Japanese), *Roomse kamille* (Dutch), *Rumian szlachetny* (Polish), Russian chamomile, St. Anne's flower, Scotch chamomile, Sweet chamomile, *Trädgårdskulla* (Swedish), True chamomile, True chamomile, Whey plant, Whig plant, and White chamomile; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'energy in adversity', humility, 'love in austerity', patience, and sweetness.

The flower centres contain azulene, the active ingredient for cosmetic and medicinal use.

Warning – taken in excess (in strength, too long an infusion, or in volume) the plant can cause nausea, vomiting and vertigo. Handling the plant can cause dermatitis. The plant may be unsuitable for sufferers of respiratory allergies.

This perennial is considered to be threatened in the wild in Britain.

Chamomile is similar in appearance to scented mayweed (*Matricaria recutita*), but the former has a flower with a solid centre, and it is shorter and more fragrant.

Nobile is Latin (known) meaning 'notable, famous or excellent'.

The name Chamomile is said to be derived from a Greek word for 'apple' as a description of the flower's smell, and Roman chamomile is said to refer to the belief that the seeds were introduced to Britain during its Roman occupation in the early centuries AD.

Valued at least since ancient Egyptian times when the plant was dedicated to Egyptian gods, it is applied today to household, medicinal and cosmetic uses.

Chamomile, with crab apple (*Malus baccata*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare var. dulce*), greater plantain (*Plantago major*), mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) and wood betony (*Stachys officinalis*), was one of the Nine Sacred Herbs of the Anglo-Saxons. They believed the plants could give protection against evil.

Low growing varieties were deliberately cultivated in green walks to allow the apple-scent to be distributed when the plant was trodden, and chamomile was one of the plants strewn on floors in the Middle Ages. For centuries it has been a traditional highlighter for fair hair and can still be found as an ingredient in modern shampoos. In England, around London, acres of land were given over to chamomile, the flowers of which were harvested and kiln-dried, in tons, annually. In mainland Europe until the mid-19th Century the flowers were used to flavour beer and sherry, and chamomile was also the significant ingredient in a popular tonic generally known as ‘camomile bitters’.

Chamomile tea, particularly that made from the single flower heads which are considered to be stronger, is noted for its relaxing properties. This would appear to be borne out by a report that 10 out of 12 patients who were served the tea (made from scented mayweed, *Chamomilla recutita*) in an American hospital were asleep within ten minutes – and it must not be forgotten that according to Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) *Peter Rabbit* took ‘camomile tea’ to soothe him after his alarming experiences in Mr. McGregor’s vegetable patch and his flight from the angry gardener. It helps to explain why some beauty salons serve chamomile tea, as this is believed to be able to relax the facial muscles.

The dried leaves were smoked like tobacco before the real thing was introduced to Europe from the Americas.

At some point chamomile found its way to North America where at least two Indian tribes commandeered it for use in their own range of medicinal applications. For the Mahuna it seems to have provided a remedy for babies’ wind, while the Cherokee considered it a possible cure for adult indigestion and some bowel disorders and female problems, as well as using it as a vomiting agent and a sedative.

Both the cosmetics and perfumery industries use chamomile today as an ingredient in commercial preparations.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended chamomile for treating nervous disorders, indigestion and intermittent fevers, and as a tonic for sufferers of fluid retention. It has also featured as an ingredient in remedies for other disorders and, alone, in compresses or poultices for the external treatment of neuralgia, toothache and earache.

It is the birthday flower for 17th December.