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Delphinium staphisagria

STAVESACRE is an annual or biennial. Native to southern Europe and south-western Asia it has minutely-spurred, green-tinged, pale blue or purple flowers.

It is also known as *Erva-piolheira* (Portuguese), *Estafisaria* (Spanish), *Herbe-aux-poux* (French), *Läusesamen* (German), Licebane, Lousewort, *Paparraz* (Portuguese), Short-spurred larkspur, *Stafisagria* (Italian), *Stephanskraut* (German), and *Zerrighet il qamel* (Maltese).

Warning – the plant yields a poison (delphinine) and the seeds are particularly poisonous. They affect the central nervous system and can cause vomiting, purging, slowed pulse, slowed respiration, paralysis of the spinal cord and death from asphyxia. In Britain it can only be obtained through a registered pharmacist.

As well as a garden plant stavesacre yields an insecticide strong enough to kill vermin. This was used by the ancient Greeks and the Romans.

Medicinally, in the past herbalists have recommended its use for neuralgia, toothache and fluid retention, and in ointment or other form it was also used to kill lice. Stavesacre can still be employed, with great care, externally today.