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Dianthus barbatus

SWEET-WILLIAM is a perennial (often grown as a biennial). Native to eastern and southern Europe it has scented, often spotted, white to red flowers.

It is also known as *Amerika nadeshiko* (Japanese), *Armaria* (Italian), *Bartnelke* (German), Bloomy-down, *Borstnejlika* (Swedish), *Bouquet parfait* (French), *Dianto barba* (Esperanto), *Duizendschoon* (Dutch): *Garofano barbuto* (Italian), *Garofano poeta* (Italian), *Hasan Yüsuf* (Arabic), *Hvozdík bradatý* (Czech), *Hvozdík vousatý* (Czech), *Jalousie* (French), *Kir karanfil* (Turkish), *Klinček bradatý* (Slovak), London pride, London tuft, *Mazetto perfetto* (Italian), *Oeillet de poète* (French), Pride of London, *Samtnelke* (German), Snowflake, Sweet John, Sweet William pink, Tolmeiner, and Williams; and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of craftiness, dexterity, diplomacy, gallantry, ‘grant me one smile’, and treachery.

Barbatus is Latin (beard) meaning ‘bearded (with long weak hairs)’.

The name Sweet-william is yet another that creates much debate. It has been variously connected with William the Conqueror (1027-1087), St. William of Rochester (who died in 1201), William III (1650-1702) who reigned as king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1689 and even William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721-1765) a military commander who displayed so much cruelty when he was sent to put down the 1745 Jacobite Rising in Scotland (which culminated in the 1746 Battle of Culloden) that he earned the name of ‘Butcher’.

Some authorities believe that sweet-william was introduced to Britain by Carthusian monks in about the 12th Century. Certainly three centuries later (some claim from 1573) they were flourishing there widely. Hampton Court records show that a new garden was planted with sweet-william during Henry VIII’s reign which began in 1509, and John Gerard (1545-1612), the English barber-surgeon and herbalist (the latter as a charlatan for many authorities) noted that they were popular garden plants during Elizabethan times.

Sweet-william (with orange lily) is an emblem of the Orangemen of Northern Ireland.

The flowers are poetically compared to its close relatives by the Englishman, Abraham Cowley (1618-1667)

Sweet William small, has form and aspect bright,
Like that sweet flower that yields great Jove delight.

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It is the birthday flower for 15th May.