

Dianthus caryophyllus

[Synonyms : *Dianthus arbuscula*, *Dianthus deltoides*, *Dianthus morrisii*, *Tunica morrisii*]

CARNATION is an evergreen perennial. Probably native to the Mediterranean it has usually dull purple flowers which have a strong and sweet, clove fragrance.

It is also known as *Angelier* (Dutch), Border carnation, Carnadine, Carnation pink, *Clavel* (Spanish), *Clavela* (Spanish), Clove carnation, Clove gillyflower, Clove-July-flower, Clove pink, Coronal, Coronation, Cottage pink, *Cravinas-dos-jardins* (Portuguese), *Cravos* (Portuguese), Dainty, Dainty lady, Divine flower, Fair maids of Kent, *Garofano* (Italian), *Garten-Nelke* (German), Gillyflower, Grenadine, *Hvozdík karafiát* (Czech), *Hvozdík zahradní* (Czech), July flower, *Karafiát* (Czech), *Kariofildianto* (Esperanto), *Klinček záhradný* (Slovak), *Landnelke* (German), Lusty gallant, Marguerite pink, Master Tuggie's princess, *Nelke* (German), *Oeillet* (French), *Oeillet-des-fleuristes* (French), Old gillyflower, Pale pageant, *Penigan Rhuddgoch* (Welsh), Picotee, Ruffling robin, Sad pageant, Sops-in-wine, Spink, *Trädgårdsnejlika* (Swedish), and Wild carnation; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'alas for my poor heart' (deep red), disdain (white or yellow), divine love, fascination, love, maternal love, refusal (striped), and woman's love (pink).

Cultivated varieties can be found in many different colours.

Oil known as Carnation oil is extracted from the flowers.

Warning – the petals should only be eaten in the precise quantities shown in a published recipe.

Caryophyllus is derived from Greek *karya* (walnut) and *phyllo-* (leaf) components meaning 'smelling of walnut leaves'.

Some authorities recall that its flower buds were once used as cloves.

Dedicated to the 'sky father' by the Greeks and called Jove's flower by the Romans, carnations have received much admiration and honour and were to be found, like pinks (*Dianthus plumarius*), in the garlands of both civilisations.

There is a Christian legend that tells how the carnation first appeared from Mary's tears as they touched the earth as she made her way to Calvary, and the pink carnation symbolizes 'mother love'. In Medieval paintings the flowers symbolized marriage.

In the English Elizabethan era many are said to have believed that if you sported a carnation you would avoid death on the gallows.

Some authorities believe that the carnation, like the pink (*Dianthus plumarius*), was introduced to Britain in the 11th Century at the time of the Norman Conquest. From the English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1354-1400), it is understood that carnations were being cultivated widely in England during the reign of Edward III (1312-1377). They were favoured as a coronary or garland flower, and authorities believe they were called 'coronations' as in Edmund Spenser's (c.1552-1599) *The Shepheardes Calender*.

Bring coronations and sops-in wine

Worn of paramours.

[Whereas those versed in the works of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the English playwright and poet, point out that his use of 'carnation' in his plays is not a reference to the flower but means 'flesh-coloured'.] Reflecting upon this, some authorities claim that

Henry Lyte (1793-1847), the Scottish hymn-writer (whose best known hymn was probably *Abide with me*), was the first to use the name 'carnation' for the flower. The flowers were added to drinks to give a spicy flavour as a result of which one of their names used to be 'sops-in-wine'. In the early 20th Century carnations were particularly fashionable among the British élite and some suggest they would make the perfect emblem for Edward VII's (1841-1910) reign.

In France the 29th June has not only had the honour of being dedicated to St. Peter (1st Century) and St. Paul (1st Century) but has been singled out as Carnation Day. Carnations seem to have played an important role in several events in French history. The French novelist, Madeleine de Scudéry (1608 -1701) immortalized a poignant episode with the words

See these flowers that a famous soldier
Tended with the hand that held a sword
And bear in mind - Apollo built a wall
So why should Mars not play the gardener?

She was referring to Prince de Condé (1621-1686), the famous French nobleman and soldier who, when serving a sentence as a political prisoner in the Bastille passed the time by growing carnations. Then in the following Century the flower takes centre-stage again. Apparently its green envelope (the calyx) had by then long been used to convey secret messages, especially those between lovers, – on this occasion however a life was at stake. In January 1793 the French Revolution got into full swing and Louis XVI (1754-1793) received the embrace of Madame Guillotine, and in the August Marie Antoinette (1755-1793) was sent to the Conciergerie. The following month she received a visit from a stranger, one the Chevalier de Rougeville who left a carnation in her cell. This contained a hidden message giving details of her rescue – to which she responded by pricking out her confirmation of it on a piece of paper with a pin (as she had no pen and ink). But the stranger had disconcerted her so much that her jailers were suspicious and discovered the plot. They then placed her under greater surveillance until she, too, was executed by the guillotine in the October. Apparently that scrap of paper can be found today in the National Archives in Paris.

The carnation is also a flower especially associated with Mother's Day in the United States of America – and Ohio State has adopted a scarlet carnation as an emblem since 1904.

Today pure Carnation oil can be an ingredient in expensive perfumes.

Medicinally, the old herbalists used the plant in the treatment of poisoning, feverish ailments, and heart and brain disorders.

It is the birthday flower for 19th December, and a flower associated with January.