

*Dianthus plumarius*

[Synonyms : *Dianthus hoppei*, *Dianthus hungaricus*, *Dianthus lumnitzeri*, *Dianthus plumarius* var. *semperflorens*, *Dianthus praecox*]

**PINK** is an evergreen perennial. Native to southern Europe and India it has rose-pink to white flowers.

It is also known as Border pink, Chelsea pink, *Clavel coronado* (Spanish), *Clavelina* (Spanish), *Clavellina* (Spanish), Clove pink, Common pink, Cottage pink, *Cravo-da-escócia* (Portuguese), *Dianteo pluma* (Esperanto), Feathered pink, *Federnelke* (German), *Fjädernejlika* (Swedish), Fragrant cottage pink, Fringed pink, Garden pink, *Garofanino* (Italian), Gillyflower, Grass pink, *Hvozdk pĕřitý* (Czech), Indian eye, Mary's pink, *Mignardise* (French), Mother-of-all-pinks, *Penigan Cyffredin* (Welsh), Pheasant's eye, Pheasant's eye pink, Ringed pink, Scotch pink, Sops-in-wine, and Wild pink; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of always lovely, amiability, boldness, bonds of affection, divine love, fascination (white), ingeniousness (white), morning light, 'pure and ardent love' (double red), pure love (single red), refusal (variegated), talent (white), timidity, welcoming, and woman's love.

The scented varieties have flowers with a strong and sweet, clove-like fragrance, particularly at night.

The flowers can be infused in almond oil (for a sweet oil), or in vinegar (for a wine vinegar).

*Plumarius* means 'feathered, frilled or plumed' with reference to the flowers.

Pinks are the original Gillyflower' ('gilly' is an Old English word for 'July'). When this plant was first introduced to Britain the word 'pink' as a colour did not exist and unusually the flower has given its name to the colour. However as a term used in needlework for a scalloped edge, the word may refer to the flower's appearance – certainly the English barber-surgeon and herbalist (the latter as a charlatan for many authorities) John Gerard (1545-1612) believed that this was reflected by *plumarius* in its botanical name. Some say that the name combines a Dutch and an English word that means a small winking eye (a possible reference to the centre of the flower).

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

Some authorities believe that the pink, like the carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), was introduced to Britain in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century at the time of the Norman Conquest. The flowers that still grow untamed in the walls of Rochester Castle are thought to have arrived, by chance in the mortar imported by the Normans from France.

England used to be famous for her sheep and one of the relevant self-explanatory sayings ran  
When white pinks begin to peer,  
Then's the time your sheep to shear!.

The flowers used to be floated in drinks given to engaged couples.

In Britain pinks are said to have been at the height of their popularity in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, not least in one of the Scottish cotton mill towns, Paisley. Here they wove imitation Kashmiri shawls and attempted to absorb the flower into the oriental designs.

One of today's well-known and oldest varieties is the double white flowered, 'Mrs. Sinkins'.

This was raised in the gardens of a Slough workhouse in the county of Buckinghamshire in England in the 1870s. Mr. Sinkins was the master of the workhouse and named the flower after his wife, Catherine. When eventually Charles Turner, a local nurseryman, acquired the stock of this variety Mr. Sinkins released it on the condition that its name should remain unchanged. The story does not end here however as in 1938 the town of Slough became an English Borough and for its arms chose a Buckinghamshire swan holding a pink 'Mrs. Sinkins' in its beak.

In English literature the poet Edmund Spenser (c.1552-1599) wrote

Her lovely eyes like pincks but newly spred.

But those authorities well versed in the works of his celebrated peer, William Shakespeare (1564-1616), show that his mention of 'pink' could not have referred to the flower familiar today.

The flower is used in heraldic devices to denote admiration and in medieval art to symbolize divine love. Worn by a lady it was also a sign that she was engaged to be married.

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 31<sup>st</sup> May.