

*Disporum hookeri*

[Synonyms : *Disporum oreganum*, *Prosartes hookeri*, *Prosartes oreganum*]

**HOOKER'S FAIRY BELL** is a perennial. Native to western North America it has small, whitish-green flowers.

It is also known as Drops of gold, and Fairy bells.

*Hookeri* commemorates either an English father or his son, Sir William Jackson Hooker or Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker.

Sir William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865) turned his attention to botany in his mid-20s and was eventually to specialise in ferns. After returning from his first expedition (to Iceland) when he lost most of his collection of minerals, botanical specimens, notes and drawings in a fire on board ship, he published his recollections of the inhabitants and flora in *Tour in Iceland*. (He had been encouraged to do this by his future father-in-law, the banker, botanist and antiquary Dawson Turner (1775-1858), and had also received support from the English botanist Sir Joseph Banks (1744-1820), who lent him his own Journals of a similar trip.) He had become a Fellow of the Linnean Society in 1806 and now, in 1812 he was also made a Fellow of The Royal Society. Further botanical expeditions in Europe in 1814 led to his development of a much respected private herbarium for which, in subsequent years, he would receive valuable contributions from all over the world. From 1816-1820 he appears to have concentrated on publishing several scientific works, including *Muscologia* and for the rest of his career would prove to be a prolific writer, editor, contributor, and correspondent with his many friends. He was appointed Regius Professor of Botany at Glasgow in 1820 and proved to be a popular lecturer thus fostering both future correspondents and plant collectors. In 1821 he published *Flora Scotica* while also helping to establish the Royal Botanic Institution of Glasgow and enhance the Glasgow Botanic Gardens. Despite all his other activities he still found time to encourage the inclusion of botanists on government expeditions, and maintained working relationships with many institutions including the British East India Company, the Admiralty and the Foreign and Colonial Offices. In 1836 he became a Knight of Hanover and in 1841 was appointed to Kew Gardens as its first Director (in succession to the Superintendent, William Townsend Aiton (1766-1849)), a post he held until 1865 when he died from a throat disease which had become rife at Kew. (On his death he left his own significant botanical collection to Kew.) Authorities point out that under his leadership the Gardens increased from 10 to 75 acres, with not only a 270 acre arboretum but also added glasshouses, including the Palm House, an economic botany museum, a Herbarium and Library. He was responsible too for significantly increasing access for the general public with an official guidebook. Apart from those works already mentioned others included *British Flora*, *Genera Filicum*, and *Species Filicum* (he was writing *Synopsis Filicum* when he died and it was eventually published in 1868).

Sir William's second son was Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), a botanist, explorer and writer. At the beginning of his career he was appointed Assistant-Surgeon on HMS *Erebus*, one of the two ships involved in Sir James Clark Ross's (1800-1862) Antarctic Expedition of 1839-1843 to the magnetic South Pole. During the voyage he collected both marine and plant specimens and upon his return to England he published various

works under *The Botany of the Antarctic Voyage*. He also met Charles Darwin which began a lifelong friendship. (Darwin would in correspondence from 1844 onwards disclose his evolving thoughts on the evolution of species and when Darwin eventually published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, Sir Joseph Hooker would be the first academic from the sciences to endorse him.) In 1846 Hooker was botanist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain. The following year he was not only made a fellow of The Royal Society but he also travelled to India and the Himalayas on a three-year expedition which embraced a brief imprisonment by the raja of Sikkim. This expedition included collecting plants for Kew Gardens, as well as making topographical surveys and gathering avian and geological specimens. Back in England afterwards he published several works based on his trip to India, not least *The Himalayan Journals* (which he dedicated to Darwin) and he also became the Medical Service's examiner in botany. He received the Royal Medal from The Royal Society in 1854 and the next year became an Assistant Director at Kew (under his father) and in 1860 he visited Palestine. He succeeded his father as Director of Kew in 1865, a post which he held for twenty years and during which he not only enhanced even further Kew's standing worldwide but also established *Index Kewensis* which is still maintained there today and saw the first Jodrell Laboratory built initially for physiological research. In the 1870s made expeditions to the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, and the south-western United States. During that decade as well he was President of The Royal Society from 1873-1877 and in 1887 the Society awarded him it Copley Medal and the Darwin Medal followed five years later. Hooker also received the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. He was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India in 1877 then a Knight Grand Commander in 1897. Edward VII (1841-1910) bestowed the Order of Merit on him in 1907. Among his larger works he published the seven volumes of *Flora of British India* and, apart from those already mentioned, he also wrote *Students Flora of the British Isles* and *Genera Plantarum*.

In the past the berries were harvested for food by some of the local North American Indian tribes such as the Thompson Indians. Although today the fruit are still collected locally on occasion authorities suggest that they are far more palatable for grouse and chipmunks than human beings.

The Californian Costanoan Indians ate the fruit as a remedy for some kidney problems.