

Dodecatheon meadia

[Synonyms : *Dodecatheon pauciflorum*]

SHOOTING STAR is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has small cyclamen-like, scented, yellow-ringed and dark eyed, rosy pink through lilac to white flowers. It is also known as American cowslip, *Boží květ* (Czech), *Boží kvet meadow* (Slovak), Common shooting star, Compass plant, Cowslip, Cyclamen, Doty, Gentlemen and ladies, Indian chief, Johnny jump, Lamb's noses, Mad violet, Midland shooting star, Mosquito bells, Pinks, Poet's shooting star, Prairie cyclamen, Prairie pointers, Pride of Ohio, Rooster head, Snakeheads, and Virginia cowslip; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of perfection, 'my divinity' 'you are my angel' and 'you are twelve goddesses embodied in one'.

Meadia commemorates an English physician and writer, Richard Mead (1673-1754), who was a patron of the arts and botany. He studied medicine at several European universities from 1689-1696. While at Leiden one of his fellow students, Hermann Boerhaave (1688-1738), became a lifelong friend, and he also attended some of the lectures of the professor of botany, the German-born Dutchman, Paul Hermann (1646-1695). Back in England he established a practice in Stepney and published *A Mechanical Account of Poisons* in 1702. He became a Fellow of The Royal Society the following year when he was also appointed physician to St. Thomas's Hospital. His progress was such that in 1714, upon the death of his friend, the English physician, John Radcliffe (1650-1714) after whom several prominent landmarks in Oxford are named, he moved to Bloomsbury Square (absorbing Radcliffe's practice) and was ministering to the famous and wealthy, including royalty of whom one of the first was Queen Anne (1665-1714) on her deathbed – yet throughout his life he would waive his fee for poor patients and is said to have given both medical advice and money generously to those in need. He was recognised as the leading physician and in 1716 became a Fellow of the Company of Surgeons. In 1719 at the Government's request he wrote *A Short Discourse Concerning Pestilential Contagion and the Methods to be Used to Prevent It* (which eventually ran to nine editions); in 1721 his actions established a practice of inoculation in the Country at large, and in 1727 he was appointed physician to George II (1683-1760). His home and practice had moved yet again in 1720 to Great Ormond Street, where now the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children stands. Apart from his practice (which extended beyond London) he now wrote apothecaries' prescriptions in the City of London's coffee houses at specified times. He maintained a wide circle of friends, including academics and politicians, and many correspondents (home and abroad). He not only lectured, but also wrote medical books and papers throughout his life – and he also collected, apparently on a vast scale, not only about 10,000 books, manuscripts (including rare ancient Greek, Latin and Oriental ones) and drawings, but precious stones, coins and statues as well. Buried in London's Temple Church, a memorial to him can be found in Westminster Abbey.

Shooting star is believed to have been introduced to Britain in the early 17th Century by John Tradescant the Elder (1570-c.1638), the English naturalist who, like his son after him, became head gardener to the British monarch. Records say that it was flowering in the

gardens of Fulham Palace, London in 1709 but apparently its popularity as a British garden plant only burgeoned from 1744.