

Drimia maritima

[Synonyms : *Scilla maritima*, *Urginea maritima*, *Urginea scilla*]

SQUILL is a succulent bulbous perennial. Native to the Canary Islands, the Mediterranean (Spain to Syria, and Saudi Arabia) and South Africa, it has white or rose flowers.

It is also known as *Adasoğani* (Turkish), *Askillitoúra* (Greek), Crusader's spears, *Drimio mara* (Esperanto), *Ghansal kbir* (Maltese), Giant hyacinth, Maritime squill, *Mäusezwiebel* (German), *Meerzwiebel* (German), *Merisipuli* (Finnish), Scilla, Sea onion, Sea squill, *Sjölök* (Swedish), *Skyllokrómmyda* (Greek), and White squill.

Warning – an extremely poisonous plant juice. The plant can only be used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. It should not be used if suffering from some kidney disorders. It can cause violent gastro-intestinal irritation, nausea, purging, vomiting, abdominal pain, lowered body temperature, weakened circulation, dullness, stupor, convulsion and death.

A small band of about 10 flower buds on the flower spike bloom at one time and close at night, followed similarly by the group above them the following morning so that the flowering for one stalk extends through about a week.

Maritima is Latin (of the sea) meaning 'coastal, or of the sea or seaside'.

Used by the ancient Egyptians squill is one of the oldest medicinal plants. Today it is rarely used in folk medicine in this capacity and then only by qualified practitioners.

Records suggest that, as a placation to fertility gods, the ancient Greeks used the bulbs to beat ritual victims (or scapegoats) to death. This tends to support other evidence of the belief in strong magical qualities that were attributed to these large and heavy bulbs.

In Cyprus children still use the dried flowerstems for making windmills.

Today both this variety and red squill (which is even more poisonous) provide commercial ingredients for rat poison.

The bulb's medicinal use can be traced back a long way. Homer (8th Century BC), the Greek epic poet, is believed to have been referring to squill when he makes mention of the 'sea onion'. Two centuries later the celebrated Greek philosopher and sage, Pythagoras (6th Century BC), probably best known today as a mathematician, is said to have formulated the cough remedy known as Oxymel of squill of which the bulb was an ingredient. This mixture is said to have been employed by the semi-legendary Greek poet, Epimenides, who was born in Crete in the 7th or 6th Century BC, and is also referred to by Theophrastus (372-c.287 BC) the Greek philosopher. In the 1st Century both the Greek physician, Dioscorides, and Pliny (23-79), the Roman natural historian, mention squill in their writings too. The Arabian physicians also used the bulb and it was they who introduced it to European practice in the Middle Ages.

Medicinally, squill has been recommended for treating fluid retention, bronchitis, catarrh, asthma and whooping cough. Today it is mainly found as an ingredient in cough remedies and can be used in the treatment of heart diseases.

RED SQUILL is a bulbous perennial variety. Found especially in North Africa it has a long spike of flowers.

Warning – it is more poisonous than squill.

Red squill has been an ingredient in hair tonics for treating dandruff.

It is not used medicinally – but it is used as an ingredient in rat poison.