

Erysimum cheiri

[Synonyms : *Cheiranthus cheiri*, *Erysimum murale*, *Erysimum suffruticosum*]

WALLFLOWER is an evergreen perennial (grown as a biennial). Native to southern Europe it has small and sweet scented, white, yellow, orange, scarlet, crimson or purple flowers. It is also known as Aegean wallflower, *Alhelí* (Spanish), *Bastone d'oro* (Italian), *Bâton d'or* (French), Bee flower, Bleeding heart, *Blodyn y Fagwyr* (Welsh), Blood wall, Bloody wallier, Bloody warrior, *Carafée* (French), Chare, *Chejr vonný* (Czech), Chevisaunce, Common wallflower, English wallflower, *Fiore del muro* (Italian), Geraflour, Gilliflower, Gillyflower, *Giroflée* (French), *Giroflie* (French), *Gizi safra* (Maltese), *Goldlack* (German), *Gyllenlack* (Swedish), Handflower, Jacks, Jerroffleris, Jilliver, Keiri-beeflower, *Keiro* (Slovak), Keyry, *Khueri* (Bengali), *Kultalukka* (Finnish), *Lackviol* (Swedish), *Lahore subu* (Indian), *Levkoje* (German), March gilly-flower, *Mûrailler* (French), *Muurbloem* (Dutch), *Phool* (Urdu), *Ravenelle* (French), *Sari* (Turkish), Sauce alone, *Sebboy* (Turkish), *Shabbō asfar* (Arabic), *Todri-surkh* (Hindi), *Todri-surukh* (Punjabi), *Trýzel chejr* (Czech), *Violacciocco giallo* (Italian), *Violette de châté* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Violette sauvage* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Wall-gillyflower, Wall stock-gillofer, Wild cheir, Wild wallflower, Winter gilly-flower, Yellow flower, Yellow stock gillyflower, and Yellow violet; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of fidelity in adversity, and rural happiness.

The flowers are pollinated by butterflies.

Warning – large doses are poisonous. It should not be taken if suffering from eye or heart disorders.

Cheiri is derived from Greek *cheiro-* (hand) component.

11th Century Provence in France gave birth to the troubadours who travelled throughout Europe and were at their height for a further two hundred years, dispensing their lyric poetry of chivalrous love. For them the wallflower stood for fidelity in adversity and was worn in their headgear. A legend of a later century, the 14th, is offered by some as an explanation (in retrospect) for the troubadours' choice. Elizabeth, the Earl of March's daughter, fell in love with the son of a border chieftain although she was promised to Robert III of Scotland (c. 1340-1406). The wallflower flourished on the battlement walls of her castle-home and when her lover came for her, dressed as a minstrel, she had to drop a sprig of it as a signal that they could elope. In her haste to get away however she fell to her death and her heartbroken swain travelled Europe as a troubadour, wearing a sprig of wallflower in his cap in her memory.

Wallflower's symbolism has no doubt contributed to its popularity among poets as a subject for contemplation. One of several Scottish poems to be entitled *The Wallflower* opens with the verse

The wallflower – the wallflower,
How beautiful if blooms!
It gleams above the ruined tower,
Like sunlight over tombs!
It sheds a halo of repose
Around the wrecks of time; —

To beauty give the flaunting rose,
The wallflower is sublime.

.....

This one was written by a Scottish doctor, David Moir (1798-1851) who was known for signing his work with the Greek delta symbol. About one hundred and fifty years earlier the well known English poet, Robert Herrick (1591-1674) had also contributed to the literature on this subject in his *The Naming of the Wallflower*.

Why this flower is now called so,
List, sweet maids, and you shall know.

.....

Up she got upon a wall,
'Tempting down to slide withal;
But the silken twist untied,
So she fell, and, bruised, she died.
Jove, in pity of the deed,
And her loving, luckless speed,
Turned her to this plant we call
Now "the flower of the wall".

In the 17th and 18th Centuries in Europe posies of wallflowers were often carried to ward off germs and unpleasant odours.

According to the old custom of companion planting (a practice which seems to be regaining ground today) it was and still is thought that the nearby growth of wallflowers helped apple trees (*Malus*) to fruit.

The flower essence is used occasionally in perfumes on a commercial scale today.

Medicinally, herbalists believed the yellow wallflower to be the most potent of all the colours of wallflower, and it is hardly surprising to learn that under the Doctrine of Signatures, fashionable in the 16th Century, the yellow flower was prescribed for the treatment of jaundice. Wallflowers were recommended for the treatment of paralysis, and fluid retention, as well as for cleansing the blood and liver. The seeds were also used for treating period problems, for abortion, and for expelling stillborn babies. In India particularly they have also been employed in remedies for fevers, bronchitis and eye injuries.

It is the birthday flower for 20th May.