

Eschscholzia californica

[Synonyms : *Escholtzia cucullata*, *Eschscholtzia californica*, *Eschscholtzia maritima*, *Eschscholzia cucullata*, *Eschscholzia douglasii*, *Eschscholzia glauca*, *Eschscholzia maritima*]

CALIFORNIA POPPY is an annual or perennial. Native to western North America (particularly California) it has spicy scented, orange-yellow flowers.

It is also known as California goldenpoppy, Californian poppy, California sunlight, Chriseis, Common California poppy, Copa-di-oro, Cup of gold, *Eschscholtzia* (Dutch, English), *Eŝolzio Kalifornia* (Esperanto), Flame cups, Golden cup, *Goldmohn* (German), Gold poppy, *Kalifornischer Kappemohn* (German), Mexican gold poppy, *Sluncovka kalifornská* (Czech, Slovak), *Sömmtuta* (Swedish), and *Tuliunikko* (Finnish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ‘do not refuse me’.

Each flower lasts one day, remains closed on cloudy days and is pollinated by bees and beetles. Cultivated varieties also have white or pink flowers.

Californica means ‘of or from California (United States)’.

Local North American Indian tribes, such as the Neeshenam and Mendocino Indians, ate the leaves (roasted or boiled) as a vegetable, and the Luiseño Indians chewed the flowers like gum.

Apparently there is a North American Indian legend that explains the presence of gold in the ground by telling how the California poppy’s golden petals slowly sink down through the earth year by year.

A decoction of California poppy’s flowers was used as an insecticide by the Costanoan tribe. They rubbed it into their hair to kill lice.

For several North American Indian tribes the plant provided medicine. It was taken by nursing mothers in the Mendocino Indian tribe and some of the Pomo tribe to stem the flow of milk, and the former also used it for treating stomach upsets, headaches, toothache and tuberculosis. The Costanoan Indians believed that the flowers had a soporific effect as they laid them under children’s beds to put them to sleep.

This plant was discovered in 1792 by Archibald Menzies (1754-1842) but it was then ‘lost’ until the Kotzebue expedition sailed into sight of the Pacific North American coastline in 1815. It seems however that the first seed received in Britain must only have arrived in the 1820s when it was sent home by the famous Scottish botanist, David Douglas (1798-1834) – although it may have reached the European continental mainland well before that time.

Cattle have been allowed to graze the plants in some areas such as south-western California. The California poppy is a State flower for California adopted in 1903.

Medicinally, the colourless latex (which has mildly narcotic properties) was once used locally by herbalists to ease toothache.