

*Fumaria officinalis*

[Synonyms : *Fumaria media*, *Fumaria muralis*]

**COMMON FUMITORY** is a climbing or trailing annual. Native to Europe (including Britain) it has pinkish-purple to yellowish-white flowers with dark reddish (occasionally white) tips.

It is also known as Babe in the cradle, Beggary, Birds on the bush, Common fumaria, *Dahnet l-art* (Maltese), Dicky birds, Drug fumitory, *Duivelskervel* (Dutch), Earth smoke, *Erdrauch* (German), Faminterry, Favourite, Fevetory, Few-flowered fumitory, *Fumeterre* (French), *Fumeterre officinale* (French), Fumiterry, Fumitory, *Fummo terro* (Italian), *Fumosterno officinale* (Italian), Fumus, *Gebräuchlicher Erdrauch* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Erdrauch* (German), *Gewone duivekervel* (Dutch), *Gewone Duiwekerwel* (Afrikaans), God's fingers and thumbs, Hedge fumitory, Hemitory, Jam tarts, *Jordrök* (Swedish), Lady's lockets, Lady's shoe, Mother of thousands, *Mwg y Ddaear Cyffredin* (Welsh), Nidor, *Palomilla* (Spanish), *Pit-papara* (Hindi), Red-tipped web, Sax dolls, *Shahtara* (Urdu), Snapdragon, Tobacco, *Vanlig jordrök* (Swedish), Vapor, Vapour, Wax dolls, *Zemedym lekársky* (Slovak), and *Zemědým lékařský* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'ill at ease', and spleen.

Warning – common fumitory is poisonous and can cause diarrhoea.

*Officinalis* means 'of the shop (usually the apothecary's or herbalist's)'. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name

The plant has been the centre of much legend, not least that it appeared from emanations in the ground (instead of seed) and that its smoke (when burnt) could both repel and expel evil spirits.

At one time this plant was used as the source of both a yellow and a green dye. The English peasant poet, John Clare (1793-1864), makes mention of common fumitory in his *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life* published in 1820 in which he describes them being used cosmetically as a skin cleanser. It has also been used in potions applied to remove freckles.

Medicinally, in earlier times common fumitory was relied upon for the treatment of skin diseases arising from intestinal disorders, a preventative against plague and scurvy, and a remedy for arteriosclerosis. The leaves were smoked like tobacco as a cure for headaches and it was also prescribed as a tonic. Today it is employed mainly for liver ailments, skin disorders and stomach complaints.

It is the birthday flower for 1<sup>st</sup> September.