

*Galium odoratum*

[Synonyms : *Asperula odorata*]

**WOODRUFF** is a perennial. Native to Asia, central and northern Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa, it has small white flowers.

It is also known as *Ackermeier* (German), *Asperula* (Spanish), *Asperula dei campi* (Italian), *Aspérule des champs* (French), *Aspérule odorante* (French), *Asperulo odora* (Esperanto), *Bbožec* (Czech), Bedstraw, Bloodcup, *Briwydden Bêr* (Welsh), *Cordialis*, *Duft-Labkraut* (German), *Fleur de la St.-Vierge* (French), *Galio odora* (Esperanto), Hayplant, Herb Walter, Kiss-me-quick, Ladies-in-the-hay, Lady's needlework, Madder, *Mařenka* (Czech), *Mariengras* (German), *Mařinka vonná* (Czech), Master of the wood, *Muge-de-boys* (French), Mugget, Mugwet, *Myska* (Swedish), *Myskmadra* (Swedish), New-mown hay, *Piccolo mughetto* (Italian), *Raspello* (Italian), *Regina dei boschi* (Italian), *Reine des bois* (French), Rice flower, *Ris* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Rockweed, Rockwood, Scented hairhoof, *Skovmærke* (Danish), Squinancy, Star grass, *Stellina odorosa* (Italian), *Svízel vonný* (Czech), Sweet bedstraw, Sweet grass, Sweet hairhoof, Sweethearts, Sweet-scented bedstraw, Sweet woodruff, *Tuoksumatara* (Finnish), *Valdmajstr* (Czech), *Voňavý svízel* (Czech), *Waldmeier* (German), *Waldmeister* (German), Waldmeister tea, White-flowered woodruff, Witherrips, Woodrep, Woodrova, Wood-rowell, Woodward, Woody-ruffee, and Wuderove; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of modest worth.

Warning – taken in large amounts it can cause dizziness, vomiting and other poisoning symptoms. It must not be taken internally during pregnancy. Although it is understood to be banned in commercially prepared food in the United States it is approved in some countries for use in alcoholic drinks.

*Odoratum* is derived from Latin *odor* (scent, smell, odour) meaning 'scented or fragrant'.

Teutonic tribes believed that woodruff could encourage success in battle and for this reason soldiers would wear a sprig in their helmets. In the Middle Ages the sweet-smelling, uplifting plant was hung in garlands in churches especially on statues of the Virgin Mary on the Feast Days of St. Barnabas (11<sup>th</sup> June) and St. Peter (29<sup>th</sup> June). It was also strewn on the floors of homes, and was used to scent bed-linen and stuff mattresses. Sweethearts were adorned with woodruff garlands at Spring and Summer festivals. Elizabeth I (1533-1603), who was queen of England and Ireland from 1538, was said to have given a sprig of woodruff to any individual who happened to be in favour.

Today the Germans add woodruff to Rhine wine and drink it on 1<sup>st</sup> May. It has also been added to cakes, soups and sauces, and has also been included in salads.

Woodruff is used commercially by the drinks industry (particularly in Germany and Austria), and by the tobacco industry as a flavouring in snuff. It is an ingredient in the manufacture of soap and is occasionally employed by the perfumery industry. The plant is also used in proprietary medicines.

Medicinally, herbalists used woodruff as a protection against plague. They used it in treatments for epilepsy, paralysis, headaches, and liver and heart ailments as well. It was recommended as a digestive aid too. In addition, in the Scottish Highlands and France particularly, woodruff tea was taken as a remedy for colds and some forms of

tuberculosis, and was also administered to reduce fever. Today this plant is recognized as an important source of anti-coagulant drugs, and can sometimes be used to treat nervous tension is recognized is recognized in children and the elderly.