

Galium verum

[Synonyms : *Galium glabratum*]

LADY'S BEDSTRAW is a perennial. Native to Europe and the Middle East to Iran, it has tiny golden-yellow flowers.

It is also known as A-hundredfald, Bed flower, Bedstraw, *Briwydden Felen* (Welsh), Broom, *Caille-lait jaune* (French), Cheese rennet, Cheese renning, Cleaverwort, Common cleavers, Creeping Jenny, *Cuaja leche* (Spanish), Curdwort, *Echtes Labkraut* (German), Fleaweed, Fleawort, *Gaglio* (Italian), *Gaillet vrai* (French), Gallion, *Gliedkraut* (German), Golden dust, Goosegrass, Gravel grass, *Gulmåra* (Swedish), Halfsmart, Hundredfald, Joint-grass, *Jungfru Marie sänghalm* (Swedish), *Käslabkraut* (German), Keeslip, *Keltamatara* (Finnish), *Labkraut* (German), Lady's bed, Lady's golden bedstraw, Lady's tresses, *Liebfrauenstroh* (German), *Liebkraut* (German), Maiden's hair, *Melklöbe* (Danish), Maid's hair, Milkswet, *Mundfäulkraut* (German), *Myi d'mielle* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Our Lady's bedstraw, *Petit muguet* (French), Petty mugget, Poor robin, Rennet, Robin-run-the-hedge, Savoyan-clabbergrass, *Sternkraut* (German), Sticker plant, Strawbed, *Svível syřišťový* (Czech), *Trätogräs* (Swedish), *Walstroo* (Dutch), Wild rosemary, Yellow bedstraw, Yellow cleavers, Yellow Spring bedstraw, and *Y Felynllys* (Welsh).

Verum is Latin (true, genuine) meaning 'true or standard' with reference to the species as typical of the genus.

From the days of the Greek Empire through to the 1800s (roughly 2,000 years) lady's bedstraw was used in Europe in the manufacture of cheese and to curdle milk. In England in the north of the Country it was used as an alternative to rennet and the celebrated Double Gloucester and Cheshire cheeses obtained their rich colour from the use of lady's bedstraw as one of the ingredients.

The roots yield a red dye.

Superstition surrounding lady's bedstraw explains a custom once common in some areas of Germany. Before entering the home of a neighbour who had just given birth (a time when the mother would be most vulnerable to demons) the visitor would place the plant inside his or her shoes.

As indicated by some of its common names ('lady' alludes to the Virgin Mary) the plant is associated with Christian lore. Legend tells how lady's bedstraw was part of the bedding in the stable in Bethlehem where the baby Jesus (c. 6BC-c. 30AD) was born and in days gone by it was used for stuffing mattresses. The French artist, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), one of whose works for instance is the famous painting known as *The Worship of the Golden Calf* which hangs today in the London National Gallery, is said to have portrayed lady's bedstraw in the manger in a painting of the Christian Nativity.

Medicinally, the plant was once used to treat fluid retention and epilepsy, and was also relied upon for stemming nosebleeds, and for healing skin infections and wounds. The flowers of lady's bedstraw when added to water were also believed to be able to provide a soothing footbath for aching feet. Today lady's bedstraw is used in homoeopathic treatments.