

Geranium robertianum

[Synonyms : *Geranium carolinianum*, *Geranium robertianum* var. *eriphorum*, *Robertiella robertiana*]

HERB-ROBERT is an erect or prostrate, annual to perennial. Native to northern temperate areas (including North America, Europe and Asia), it has small white-striped, pink or rose (occasionally white) flowers.

It is also known as Adder's tongue, Angels, Baby's pinafore, Bachelor's buttons, Billy button, Bird's eye, Biscuit flower, Bloody mary, Bloodwort, Bobbies, Bob robert, Candlesticks, Cat's eye, Chatterboxes, Chinese lantern, Cry baby, Cuckoo's eye, Cuckoo's meat, Cuckoo's victuals, *Dail Robin* (Welsh), Death-come-quickly, Dog's toe, Doll's shoes, Dolly's apron, Dolly's nightcap, Dolly's shoes, Dragon's blood, Drunkards, *Epile* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Erba roberta* (Italian), *Erva roberta* (Portuguese), Fellow grass, Fellowwort, Fox geranium, Fox grass, Garden gates, *Géranium à Robert* (French), Gipsies, Gipsyflower, Granny's needles, Granny-thread-the-needle, Headache, Hedge lovers, Hen and chickens, *Herbe à l'esquinancie* (French), *Herbe à Robert* (French), Herb robin, *Hierba de San Roberto* (Spanish), Hop-o'-my-thumb, Jack-by-the-hedge, Jack flower, Jack horner, Jam tarts, Jenny flower, Jenny hood, Jenny wren, Joe stanley, John hood, *Kakost smrdutý* (Czech), Kiss-me, Kiss-me-love, Kiss-me-love-at-the-garden-gate, Kiss-me-quick, Knife and fork, Lady janes, Little bachelor's buttons, Little jack, Little jan, Little john robin hood, Little red robin, Little robin, *Llysiaúr Llwynog* (Welsh), *Llys y Llwynog* (Welsh), London pink, Mary janes, Mother-thread-my-needle, Mountain geranium, Musk geranium, Nightingale, *Pakost smradlavý* (Slovak), Pink bird's eye, Pink pinafore, Poor jane, Poor robert, Poor robin, Print pinafores, Ragged robin, Red bird's eye, Red bobby's eye, Redbreasts, Red robin, Redshank, Redweed, Robert, Robert geranium, Robert's bill, *Roberts kruid* (Dutch), Robin, Robin hood, Robin i' the' hedge, Robin redbreast, Robin redshanks, Robin's eye, Robin's flower, Round robin, *Rouoget* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Rubwort, *Ruprechtskraut* (German), *Ruprechts-Storchschnabel* (German), *Rupprechts Storchschnabel* (German), Sailor's knot, St. Robert's herb, Small robin's eye, Snakeflower, Snapjack, Soldiers, Soldier's buttons, Sparrow-birds, Squinter-pip, Stars, Stinker bobs, *Stinkender Storchschnabel* (German), *Stinkende Storkenæb* (Danish), Stinkflowers, Stinking Bob, Stinking crane's-bill, Stinking jenny, Stinking robert, Stinking roger, *Stinknäva* (Swedish), *Storchschnabel* (German), Storkbill, Storks, Wild crane's-bill, *Wilde geranium* (Dutch), Wild geranium, Wild pink, and Wren's flower.

The flowers droop at night and in bad weather. The fruit pod splits when mature and can eject the seeds several feet.

Robertianum can commemorate one or more of several people, including St. Robert of Molesme, Robert (one of the Dukes of Normandy), St. Rupert, St. Robert de Turlande and the legendary Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest. The most likely candidate appears to be uncertain in this case.

First a French Benedictine monk, St. Robert of Molesme (1027-1110), to whom in 1075 Pope Gregory VII (c.1020-1085) gave permission to found a monastery in Burgundy in the forest of Molesme. Its initial establishment was exacerbated by disruptive external

influences and from 1098 he with several of his fellow monks (including one who would become St. Alberic (died 1108/9)) moved to a remote area in the Dijon region (Citeaux) owned by the then Viscount of Beaune. Here they founded a new Cistercian monastery which was destined to provide a guiding light for this new Order. But in 1100 St. Robert was urged to return to Molesme where the remaining monks had agreed to submit to his leadership based on the Rule of St. Benedict. He was canonized in 1222 by Pope Honourius III (1148-1227). Not only is he said to have used herb-robert (*Geranium robertianum*) to cure different diseases but the plant also flowers on his feast day celebrated by Roman Catholics on 29th April.

Then a Frenchman, Robert (1054-1135), one of the Dukes of Normandy for whom in 1490 Johann von Cube wrote a herbal known as *Hortus Sanitatis* which was celebrated for several hundred years.

Then a Frankish-Merovingian (or even Irish) Benedictine priest, St. Rupert (mid-600s - 718) who is the patron saint of salt miners and mining. He was initially Bishop of Worms and from 696 the first Abbot-Bishop of Salzburg. While Bishop of Worms his ability and good name is said to have spread widely and on the strength of this Duke Theodo II (before 665-c.716) sought his help in reviving and strengthening Christian belief throughout Bavaria. At his death the Duke left a two square-mile region (now occupied by Salzburg, Germany originally known Iuvavum) to St. Rupert and his successors within which St. Rupert established not only the first church in that area (the Church of St. Peter) but also the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter and the convent of Nonnberg (Salzburg Cathedral was built by his successor, St. Virgil, whose remains with part of St. Rupert's remains rest under the high altar there). Traditionally St. Rupert is said to have encouraged salt mining in the region which explains why in Christian art he is depicted holding a salt cellar, barrel or vessel. His feast day, 24th September, is observed in the Salzburg area where at about that time too a fair (going back centuries, known as Ruperti Kirtag and originally of economic significance) is still held.

Then a French Benedictine priest, St. Robert de Turlande (c. 1000-c. 1067) who founded the Abbey of Chaise Dieu in the Auvergne in France. In about 1018 he became a canon at St. Julian's Church in Brioude (Auvergne) and while there founded a hospice for the poor. A period as a monk at Cluny (where he accepted spiritual guidance from St. Odilo) followed, after which he made a pilgrimage to Rome. On his return however he turned to a new life of prayer near Brioude, with one or two companions, and committed himself to serving the poor. He attracted a large following and founded the Benedictine Abbey of Chaise-Dieu which he led as Abbot and which, although still a hermitage (it fell to Pope Leo IX to erect the subsequent Abbey) at the time of his death, had about 300 monks. His feast day is 24th April.

Finally today's legendary English folk hero and outlaw, Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest in northern England (otherwise known as Robert or Robin Goodfellow, who to complicate matters further was associated by some people, including Shakespeare, with the Roman god Mercury). If a real person, he is believed to have lived in the 1200s. The numerous descriptions of him over the centuries have varied from one extreme to the other, from criminal to nobleman. Today it is in a phase when stories recount daring exploits of how he stole from the rich to give to the poor and defied an autocratic local sheriff.

Some authorities suggest that the plant was instrumental in helping to cure an outbreak of what was known as Robert's plague in Germany. Many of its common names indicate connections with witchcraft.

There was certainly one notable European superstition. If herb-robert was picked and taken inside the house death would follow.

Herb-robert has been used for tanning.

In North America the plant has been used in veterinary medicine, particularly for horses. It has also been used in the past in Ireland for treating such diseases as foot-and-mouth in cattle.

Medicinally, under the Doctrine of Signatures (the dogma that attracted a popular following in the 16th Century) it was believed that herb-robert could regenerate blood. Herbalists have used it to stem internal and external bleeding, as well as in the treatment of kidney disorders, piles and ulcers. Today herb-robert is used in homoeopathic treatments.