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*Gerbera jamesonii*

**BARBERTON DAISY** is an evergreen perennial. Native to Natal and the Transvaal (South Africa) it has daisy-like, orange-scarlet flowers.

It is also known as African daisy, Gerbera (Czech, English), Gerbera daisy, *Gerbera jamesonova* (Slovak), *Rooigousblom* (Afrikaans), and Transvaal daisy.

The flowers close partially at night. Cultivated varieties produce cream to deep red flowers.

*Jamesonii* commemorates a Scotsman, Robert Jameson (1832-1908) who emigrated to South Africa in 1856 and established himself as a jam and condiment manufacturer, Jameson's Jam, in Durban. Already serving as a Durban Councillor, he became a member of the Natal Botanical Garden Committee in 1867. He was a vigorous Councillor (eventually becoming Mayor for two years from 1895) and in 1868, apart from anything else, introduced trees to Durban's streets. In the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War he served as an officer and earned a medal. Then a gold rush began in the Barberton area and in 1884, in partnership, Jameson formed Moodies Gold Mining and Exploration Company and visited the area of the surface strike. There he collected some of the wild daisies growing everywhere around the diggings. On his return to Durban he gave them to the botanical garden and in 1888 specimens were sent to Kew Gardens in England and these daisies (of the *Gerbera* genus) were destined to become the popular cultivated plant familiar in the Western world today.

It is believed that the barberton daisy was introduced to Europe in about 1887.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the plant was the subject of intensive Dutch breeding programmes and these ultimately improved the stock. The modern hybrids have enabled the daisy to gain ever-increasing popularity in Western countries as an ornamental plant. Then at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries American research at NASA identified useful air purification qualities in barberton daisy. Apparently it is believed to be able to dissipate benzene and trichlorethylene, as well as formaldehyde present in interior environments.