

*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

[Synonyms : *Agraphis cernua*, *Agraphis nutans*, *Campanula rotundifolia*, *Endymion cernuus*, *Endymion lacaillei*, *Endymion non-scriptus*, *Endymion nutans*, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* var. *cernua*, *Hyacinthus campanulatus*, *Hyacinthus cernuus*, *Hyacinthus non-scriptus*, *Hyacinthus nutans*, *Hyacinthus pratensis*, *Lagocodes belgica*, *Lagocodes cernua*, *Lagocodes nutans*, *Scilla cernua*, *Scilla festalis*, *Scilla non-scripta*, *Scilla non-scripta* subsp. *cernua*, *Scilla nutans*, *Syncodium nutans*, *Usteria hyacinthiflora*, *Usteria non-scripta*, *Usteria secunda*]

**BLUEBELL** is a bulbous perennial. Native to western Europe (including Britain) it has scented purple-blue flowers.

It is also known as Adder's flower, Auld man's bell, Bell bottle, *Blejen an gucu* (English-Cornish), Bloody man's fingers, Blue bonnets, Blue bottle, Blue goggles, Blue granfer-greygles, Blue rocket, Blue trumpets, *Brog na Cubhaig* (Irish Gaelic), Calverkeys, *Clioches dé Carême* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Cloigín Gorm* (Irish), *Clychau'r Gog* (Welsh), *Coinnle Corra* (Irish Gaelic), *Côneille* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Cover keys, Crake-feet, Crawfeet, Crawtaes, *Croeso-haf* (Welsh), Cross flower, Crow bells, Crowfoot, Crowpicker, Crow's legs, Crowtoes, Cuckoo, Cuckoo flower, Cuckoo's boots, Cuckoo's stockings, Culverkeys, Culvers, Dog leek, *Engelsk klockhyacint* (Swedish), English bluebell, English jacinth, Fairy bells, Fairy flower, *Glas y Ilwyn* (Welsh), *Glockenblume* (German), Goosey-gander, Gowk's hose, Grammer-greygles, Granfer-gregors, Granfer-griggles, Granfer-grigglesticks, Greygles, Griggles, Hair bell, Harebell (Scottish), *Hyacinthe non-écrite* (French), Jacinth, *Jacinthe des bois* (French), *Jacinthe sauvage* (French), *Jacinto* (Spanish), Link, Locks and keys, Nodding squill, Pride of the wood, Ring-o'-bells, Rook's flower, Single gussies, Snake's flower, Snapgrass, Squill, Wild hyacinth, Wood bells, Wood hyacinth, and *Ying guo lan zhong hua* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of constancy, regret, and solitude.

Warning – the plant, particularly the seeds and the fresh bulb, is poisonous. It can cause diarrhoea, abdominal pain and a weak slow pulse – from which recovery can be slow. The sap can cause dermatitis. The plant is also poisonous for some animals.

Bluebell is a protected species in the wild in Britain to the extent that under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 no wild plants can be offered for sale and the commercial collection of seed or bulbs is forbidden. (In 2003 particularly some authorities noted that the plant has been threatened in the wild by the introduced Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) cultivated in Britain as an ornamental and which escapes and readily hybridises with this British native species.)

*Non-scripta* means 'without markings (such as those referred to in *Hyacinthus* ie.the letters <i>AI</i>, 'alas' on leaves or petals)'.

In one of its botanical synonyms *Endymion non-scripta* the *Endymion* refers to the beautiful youth who fell in love with the Roman goddess Juno and was consigned to eternal sleep by Jupiter. Particularly in old writing and poetry the bluebell has often been confused with the harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) although the two plants come from

completely different families. This is perpetuated in Scotland where today the bluebell (as described in this text) is still called ‘harebell’ and the harebell ‘bluebell’.

In England where it is dedicated to the Country’s patron saint, St. George (died c. 303), its sticky sap was used like glue in the Middle Ages to secure arrow feathers. In 16<sup>th</sup> Century Elizabethan times the bluebell’s sap (which is not actually a starch) also provided a stiffening for their ornate, fluted ruffs, and in the form of a paste it has been used in bookbinding.

At that time a distillation of the bulb was given to choristers by singing masters as it was believed to be able to prevent a boy’s voice from breaking.

Some of the legends associated with the bluebell are ominous. One suggested that any child picking bluebells alone in the woods would disappear, while an adult similarly occupied would be lead around by a pixie until rescued.

Those who have studied the works of the English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) believe that he was referring to the English bluebell in *Cymbeline* when he wrote

..... thou shalt not lack  
The flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose, nor  
The azur’d harebell, like thy veins; .....

Authorities note that it is likely that bluebells, as a decorative plant, used not to be as fashionable as today and that they seem only to have begun to attract such attention in Britain (apart from mention in literature) from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite its popularity today however there are some people who believe the flower is so unlucky that they will not allow it past the threshold.

Medicinally, the bluebell does not feature in modern medicine. But in his poetry the Englishman, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) suggests it may have been viewed in the past as a cure for snake bites.

It is the birthday flower for 30<sup>th</sup> September.