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### *Hyacinthus orientalis*

**HYACINTH** is a bulbous perennial. Native to western Asia, the north-eastern Mediterranean and eastern Europe, it has fragrant, light blue flowers.

It is also known as Common hyacinth, Dutch hyacinth, Garden hyacinth, *Gartenhyazinthe* (German), *Gjacinti* (Maltese), *Hyacint* (Dutch, Swedish), *Hyacint východní* (Czech), *Hyacint východný* (Slovak), *Hyazinthe* (German), *Jacinta* (Spanish), *Jacinto* (Spanish), Oriental hyacinth, and *Trädgårdshyacint* (Swedish); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of constancy, jealousy (purple), modest loveliness (white), and sorrow (purple).

Warning – the bulb is poisonous. It can cause diarrhoea, stomach cramps and vomiting. The sap can cause dermatitis. The bulbs can be poisonous for some animals.

Hyacinth's bulb is similar in appearance to that of onion (*Allium cepa*).

*Orientalis* means 'of or from the East'.

In Greek mythology hyacinth was said to be one of the flowers that made the couch on which Zeus, chief of the gods, and Hera his wife reclined – and in ancient Greece bridesmaids wore hyacinth in their head-dresses.

For Christians the hyacinth is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and symbolizes prudence, peace of mind and a desire for heaven. For some this hyacinth is also the biblical 'lily of the valley'.

This species, one of about 30, is that from which all the cultivated Winter-growing hyacinths are derived. These popular blooms, with their huge flower heads and myriad colours, owe much of their development to Dutch horticulturists.

The acclaimed Persian poet, Sadi (c.1184-?1292), wrote a poem on hyacinths that seems to bring to mind their scent and in translation reads

If thy mortal goods thou art bereft,  
And from thy slender store two loaves alone are left,  
Sell one, and with the dole  
Buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.

Ebenezer Elliott (1781-1849) the English master-founder from Sheffield ( probably most remembered for his satirical *Corn Law Rhymes* which opposed their continued imposition and were published in 1830) wrote of the flower

Shade-loving Hyacinth! thou comest again,  
And thy rich odours seem to swell the flow  
Of the lark's song, the redbreast's lonely strain,  
And the stream's tune – best sung where wildflowers blow –  
And ever sweetest where the sweetest grow.

It is the birthday flower for 7<sup>th</sup> March.