

Iris cristata

[Synonyms : *Iris cristata* var. *alba*, *Neubeckia cristata*]

DWARF CRESTED IRIS is a creeping perennial. Native to north-eastern North America it has fragrant, yellow- or white-patched, yellow crested, light-blue to purple flowers.

It is also known as Crested dwarf iris, Crested iris, Dwarf iris, and Lady's calamus.

The fan-shaped arrangement of lance-shaped leaves reach their full length after flowering.

Warning – according to some authorities the roots may be poisonous. Dermatitis can be experienced if sensitive skin comes into contact with the plant.

Cristata is derived from Latin *crista* (crest) meaning 'crested or with tassel-like tips' with reference to part of the flower.

The Cherokee North American Indians used the plant to treat some urinary and liver disorders, and they also included the root as an ingredient in a cream applied to skin ulcers.

In the 1750s the American Quaker botanist, John Bartram (1699-1777) introduced dwarf crested iris to England among the plants he sent across the Atlantic to Peter Collinson with whom he corresponded there.

Apart from the fact that the root has been used as a spice, it was noted during the 19th Century that hunters in Virginia in North America dug it up and chewed it to allay thirst (this despite the fact that its initial sweet and pleasant taste quickly becomes pungently acrid) – and it still can be relied on similarly today.

Medicinally, it seems that the root has been taken as a tea to ease some liver disorders and applied as an ointment in the treatment of skin ulcers.