

Iris foetidissima

[Synonyms : *Iris foetida*]

STINKING IRIS is an evergreen perennial. Native to North Africa, and western and southern Europe (including southern Britain), it has beardless, pale purplish-grey (rarely bluish or yellowish) flowers.

It is also known as Adder's mouths, Bloody bones, Blue devil, Blue seggin, *Dabiduba* (Bengali), *Dadmari* (Hindi), Dagger-flower, Dragon-flower, Dragon's tongue, Fetid iris, Field lily, Flag, Foetid gladwyn, Gladden, Gladding-root, Gladdon, Glader, Gladin, Gladwin, Gladwine, Gladwyn, Glaive lily, *Gliei* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Iris, *Iris Ddrewllyd* (Welsh), *Iris puant* (French), Lever, *Lirio fetido* (Spanish), *Lírio fétido* (Portuguese), Poison berries, *Ricottaria* (Italian), Roast beef plant, Scarlet-seeded iris, Seggin, Snake fiddles, Snake's food, Snake's meat, Snake's poison, Spurge plant, Spurgewort, Stinking gladdon, and Stinking gladwyn.

The crushed leaves have a rank 'roast beef'-like smell and the flowers are not fragrant at night.

Warning – all parts of stinking iris are potentially poisonous and should not be used without the supervision of a qualified practitioner. The underground stem is poisonous and can cause vomiting and violent diarrhoea. The sap can cause skin irritation and blistering. It is also poisonous for animals which normally avoid it because of the smell whether fresh or dried.

Foetidissima is derived from Latin *foeteo* (to stink, have a bad smell) meaning 'very bad-smelling, fetid or stinking'.

The dried ripe flower capsules and seeds are used in dried flower arrangements.

The seeds have also been used in the past as a dubious coffee substitute.

Medicinally, use of the stinking iris is mentioned in the writings of Theophrastus (c.372-c.287 BC) the Greek philosopher. In India it has been used to treat ringworm. Today the plant is rarely used in this capacity in Europe although, like others of the *Iris* species, it was once taken as a purgative (the fresh root was steeped in ale) and was also prescribed in infusion for treating nervous disorders, and easing pains and cramp.