

Iris pseudacorus

[Synonyms : *Iris acoriformis*, *Iris aquatica*, *Iris bastardi*, *Iris curtopetala*, *Iris lutea*, *Iris paludosa*]

YELLOW IRIS is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to western Europe and to the Mediterranean, it has beardless brownish-mottled, deep yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Acoro* (Italian), *Acoro bastardo* (Portuguese), *Bataklik süseni* (Turkish), *Bliajeu* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Butter and eggs, Cegg, Cheeper, Corn flag, Crane bill, Cucumber, Daggers, Dragon flower, Duck's bill, Dug's lug, False sweet flag, Flagger, Flaggon, Flagon, Flag iris, Flag lily, Flag plant, Flags, Fleur-de-lis, Fleur-de-luce, Fliggers, *Gelbe Schwertlilie* (German), *Giglio giallo* (Italian), Gladdon, Gladwyn iris, Gladwyne, *Gllâcheur* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Gul iris* (Danish), *Gul svärdsilja* (Swedish), *Iris faux acore* (French), *Iris Felen* (Welsh), *Iris jaune* (French), Jacob's sword, *Keltakurjenmiekkä* (Finnish), *Ki shōbu* (Japanese), *Kosatec žltý* (Slovak), *Kosatec žlutý* (Czech), *Kurjenmiekkä* (Finnish), Laister, Lavers, Leavers, Levers, Levver, *Lirio amarelo-dos-pântanos* (Portuguese), *Lirio amarillo* (Spanish), Livers, Livers and shalders, Mekkins, Meklin, Myrtle flower, Pale yellow iris, Pond lily, Queen-of-the-marshes, Queen-of-the-meadow, Saggon, Segg, Seggen, Shalder, Sheep-shears, Sheep-shearing flower, Sheggs, Soldiers and sailors, *Sumpf-Schwertlilie* (German), *Svärdsilja* (Swedish), *Svensk svärdsilja* (Swedish), Swan bill, Sword flag, Sword flower, Sword grass, Sword lily, Swords, Trinity plant, *Vanlig svärdsilja* (Swedish), *Wasser-Schwertlilie* (German), Water-flag, Water iris, Water lily, Water-segg, Water-skeg, Water-skegg, Yellow devils, Yellow flag, Yellow flag iris, Yellow skeggs, Yellow water flag, and Yellow water iris; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of fire, and flame.

The seeds are distributed by the wind.

Warning – the underground stem and leaves are poisonous (when fresh and possibly when dried) and should not be used without the supervision of a qualified practitioner. The underground stem 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.

Yellow iris has a similar appearance to sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*) when not in bloom although its leaves are dull blue-green unlike the glossy, yellowish-green sweet flag blades.

Pseudacorus is made up of Greek *pseudo-* (false) and the genus name *Acorus* components meaning 'false acorus'. It was said to have been confused (when not in flower) with scented sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*) which grows in similar surroundings.

Many of its common names refer to the shape of the leaves. Segg is the Anglo-Saxon word for a 'small sword' while Flag is believed to be derived from the middle English for 'rush or reed' *flagge* and Cucumber makes reference to the shape of the seeds.

The Romans used yellow iris for various ritual purifications. These no doubt accounted for the ceremonious harvesting of the roots described as taking place in his lifetime by Pliny the Elder (23-79), the Roman natural historian.

One of the legends (mentioned above) that has contributed to the weight of tradition and folklore which eventually determined the choice of flower on the French coat of arms tells how the French King, Clovis I (c.466-511) may have adopted the yellow iris after his victory over Alaric II in 507 when he is said to have killed Alaric as the Visigoth king fled the field of battle. Prior to the battle, the Frenchmen had been able to cross the Rhine in safety at a place where the flower was seen to be growing out some way towards 'mid-stream' thus indicating a ford of which his men took full advantage.

The yellow iris is generally grown today as an ornamental garden plant. Yet in the past in Britain at least it was valued for the black dye obtained from its roots. It was customary to wear 'Sabbath black' on Sundays, high days and holidays and the woollen dye most favoured was this one. The roots were also used for making ink.

Cosmetically yellow iris was employed as a treatment for freckles and blemishes.

The seeds when roasted are said to have been used as a coffee substitute.

Medicinally, the plant (which is poisonous) was recommended by herbalists for the treatment of respiratory disorders, eye infections, breast inflammation, some period problems and ulcers on sexual organs. The powdered root was also recommended as a kind of snuff to clear headaches, and was used as an antidote for poisons.