

Iris tectorum

[Synonyms : *Iris chinensis*, *Iris fimbriata*, *Iris japonica*, *Iris rosthornii*, *Iris tectorum* var. *alba*]

JAPANESE ROOF IRIS is a creeping evergreen perennial. Native to central and south-western China (and possibly Myanmar, familiar to many in the West as Burma), it has veined darker-patched blue-lilac flowers with a frilly dark-spotted white crest.

It is also known as Chinese iris, *Ichihatu* (Japanese), Iris, Roof iris, *Shaga* (Japanese), Wall flag, and Wall iris.

Warning – some authorities suspect that the roots may be poisonous. Dermatitis can be caused if sensitive skin comes into contact with the plant.

Tectorum is Latin (used for covering) meaning ‘of roofs or growing on house roofs’.

When the Japanese introduced this iris to their Islands they initially planted it on the ridges of the thatched roofs of their traditional homes – as in some parts of China. (Some authorities suggest that the flowers ended up there because Japanese ladies used finely ground underground stem as face powder. As any available land was needed for cultivating food roofs were the only places left and this practice would avoid the necessity of having to find an alternative face powder. These same authorities point out that the roots of the plant also helped to stabilize the thatch – and Japanese roof iris was supposed to have special qualities that could ward off evil spirits.)

The flowers are cultivated in Europe and North America as ornamental plants.

In conflict with those authorities who counsel caution as the root may be poisonous others indicate that an edible starch is obtainable from it and cite Japanese cultivation of the Chinese iris for its ‘edible’ root.