

You are viewing one of thousands of biographies – click below for more, including Search box and access to Plant associated organisations.

[Plant Biographies](#)

[Bibliography](#)

Jasminum officinale

[Synonyms : *Jasminum affine*, *Jasminum grandiflorum*, *Jasminum officinale* var. *grandiflorum*]

JASMINE is a deciduous or semi-evergreen, counter-clockwise-twining shrub. Possibly native to western China or the Middle East it has small, very fragrant, white flowers.

It is also known as Common jasmine, Common white jasmine, *Gelsomino* (Italian), Italian jasmine, *Jasemin* (Persian), *Jasmeno oficina* (Esperanto), *Jasmin* (French, German), *Jazmin* (Canary Island, Spanish), Jessamine, Poet's jasmine, *Rohtojasmiiini* (Finnish), Summer jasmine, True jasmine, White jasmine, *Yasmin* (Persian), and *Yeh-hsi-ming* (Chinese); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of amiability.

Many forms are available, some of which flower in Winter and not all of which give a fragrance.

Essence is extracted from the flowers by the process known as *enfleurage*.

Officinale means 'of the shop (usually the apothecary's or herbalist's)'. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name.

The name Jessamine comes from a Persian word *jâsemin* and the Arabic *ysmin*.

Although some authorities declare that jasmine is native to China there seems to be a belief amongst many others that its origins could still be open to debate. It would appear that Chinese records from the 3rd Century refer to jasmine and arabian jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*) as 'foreign' plants – and a large body of opinion would appear to support the likelihood that both species hail from Persia (now Iran) or northern India.

Dioscorides, the noted Greek physician, recorded in the 1st Century that the Persians (now Iranians) used the oil to perfume the air at banquets. This oil was made by steeping the flowers in sesame oil (*Sesamum indicum*), and was also used to scent the hair and body.

Some authorities have suggested that the name 'Gethsemane' may have been an incorrect translation of 'Jessamine' and that the Garden of Gethsemane in the Christian *Bible* was a jasmine garden containing plants grown for their fragrant oil. [In the 1400s BC Queen Hatshepsut who then ruled Egypt had raised a fragrant garden for which 31 frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*) trees had been successfully transported from Somalia to Egypt. From that time the maintenance of such a garden became a tradition with the Pharaohs who succeeded her and by the time of the last centuries BC this practice may well have been far more widespread throughout the Middle East.]

For the Chinese jasmine represents 'womanly sweetness'. Many eastern women (including ladies of the Chinese aristocracy) are said to have oiled and bound their hair with highly scented flowers, including those of jasmine.

While in Borneo (an island which now includes Brunei and parts of Malaysia and Indonesia) the women perpetuate the long-held custom of rolling jasmine into their well-oiled hair at night.

Although in India it is primarily the fragrance of the flowers that is prized, they are also used in the treatment of snake bites.

Hookah pipe stems (before they were made of rubber, *Hevea*) were made from jasmine wood in Turkey, Greece and Catalonia in Spain.

In the European culture jasmine has been associated in medieval Christian art with the Virgin Mary.

It is said that dreaming of jasmine is an omen of good luck, particularly in love.

Jasmine is cultivated as an ornamental plant.

In the West the essence is one of the basic commercial ingredients of floral perfumes, and scented soaps.

Medicinally, jasmine is a traditional ingredient in Chinese medicine, and has long been viewed there as an aphrodisiac. A decoction of root has been used to treat ringworm. It has relatively little use in Western medicine.