

Malva sylvestris

[Synonyms : *Malva grossheimii*, *Malva mauritiana*, *Malva sylvestris* var. *mauritiana*]

MALLOW is a perennial (occasionally an annual or biennial). Native to western Asia and to Europe it has dark veined, pinkish-violet flowers.

It is also known as *Algiermalve* (German), *Almindelig Katost* (Danish), Billy buttons, Blue mallow, Bread and cheese, Bread and cheese and cider, Butter and cheese, Cheesecake, Cheesecake flowers, Cheeseflower, Cheese-log, Cheeseplant, Cheeses, Chucky cheese, Common high mallow, Common mallow, Country mallow, Custard cheeses, Fairy cheese, Fliberty gibbet, French mallow, *Gartenpappel* (German), Good night at noon, *Grande mauve* (French), Ground dock, *Gul-khair* (Hindi), *Herbe fromage* (French), High cheeseweed, High common mallow, High country mallow, High mallow, *Hobbejza tar-raba* (Maltese), *Hocysen Gyffredin* (Welsh), Horse button, *Kaasjeskruid* (Dutch), *Khubaji* (Urdu), *Kiiltomalva* (Finnish), Lady's cheese, Loaves of bread, Malice, Mallace, Mallow-hock, *Malva* (Italian, Spanish), *Malve* (German), *Malvo sovaĝa* (Esperanto), Marsh-malice, Marsh mallow, Mauls, *Mauretanische Malve* (German), *Maurinmalva* (Finnish), *Mauve* (French), *Mauve sauvage* (French), Maws, *Metsämalva* (Finnish), *Molóha* (Greek), Old man's bread and cheese, Pancake plant, *Petite mauve* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Pick-cheese, Pisk-cheese, *P'tite mauve* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Rags and tatters, *Röd kattost* (Swedish), *Rödmalva* (Swedish), Round dock, *Sléz lesní* (Czech), *Slez lesný* (Slovak), *Sléz maurský* (Czech), *Stockrose* (German), Tall mallow, Truckles of cheese, *Vanlig rödmalva* (Swedish), *Vildmalva* (Swedish), *Wilde Malve* (German), and Zebrina mallow; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of beneficence, and mildness.

The flowers are usually pollinated by bees.

The flowers turn dark blue as they dry.

Warning – there have been unsubstantiated reports of animal poisoning in various countries other than Britain.

Sylvestris means 'wild, of or from woods or forests'.

In the 16th Century the plant acquired the name *omnimorbia* meaning 'cure-all', and in the same way that the seed 'head' of marsh-mallow (*Althaea officinalis*) is known as a 'cheese' so also is that of the mallow.

In addition to bog asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) which was a symbol of death, mallow was also grown round ancient Greek tombs as the Greeks believed that the dead would gain nourishment from its seeds.

The Romans had a high regard for the plant too and cultivated it as a garden herb – and it is still eaten as a vegetable today as an ingredient in traditional Chinese and Arabian dishes.

Although far less popular today children used to eat the 'cheeses' that are said by some to have a taste reminiscent of monkey nuts. An edible dye can be obtained from the dried flowers for use in food.

Mallow was not free from superstitious practice. One custom depended upon eating the boiled roots each morning (with raisins, *Vitis*) to provide a daily protection from evil. It was also one of the flowers featured on May Day in England. Country-folk wove them into garlands and strewed them in front of their doors.

In some parts of Europe the plant was recommended as a long term treatment for baldness. Medicinally, herbalists used mallow as a remedy for inflammation (including St. Antony's fire or erysipelas), stomach upsets, rheumatism, wasp stings, eye problems and sore throats, as well as for easing childbirth. However it has been superseded today by what is considered to be the more effective marsh-mallow (*Althaea officinalis*). Mallow is used now in homoeopathic treatments.