

Matthiola incana

[Synonyms : *Cheiranthus albus*, *Cheiranthus annuus*, *Cheiranthus coccineus*, *Cheiranthus fenestralis*, *Cheiranthus graecus*, *Cheiranthus hortensis*, *Cheiranthus incanus*, *Cheiranthus longipetalus*, *Cheiranthus viridis*, *Hesperis fenestralis*, *Hesperis incana*, *Mathiolaria annua*, *Matthiola annua*, *Matthiola bicornis*, *Matthiola fenestralis*, *Matthiola glabra*, *Matthiola incana* subsp. *incana*, *Matthiola longipetala*, *Matthiola longipetala* subsp. *bicornis*, *Matthiola tristis*, *Matthiolaria incana*]

HOARY STOCK (English, German) is a biennial or perennial (often grown as an annual too). Native to southern Europe (particularly the south-eastern Mediterranean), it has small heavily scented, pale purple (occasionally white) flowers.

It is also known as *Bahcasebboy* (Turkish), Brampton stock, Brompton stock, Dame's violet, Evening scented stock, Evening stock, *Fiala dlouhoplátečná* (Czech), *Fiala šedivá* (Czech), *Fiala sivá* (Slovak), *Fiorbarco* (Italian), Garnesic violet, Gills flower, Gillyflower, *Giroflée* (French), *Gizi* (Maltese), Grecian stocks, *Grekisk lövkoja* (Swedish), July flower, *Lövkoja* (Swedish), *Nacht Violen* (German), Night scented stock, Night scented violet, *Quarantaine* (French), Queen's stock, *Sarvileukoija* (Finnish), *Shabbō* (Arabic), Stock, Stock-gilliflower, *Tarhaleukoija* (Finnish), Ten-week stock, *Todri safed* (Bengali, Punjabi), *Tronco di Cavolo* (Italian), *Viola* (Italian), *Violette* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Violette d'été* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Violier* (French), Wallflower stocks, and *Winterlerkoje* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of lasting beauty, and promptness.

Cultivated varieties have many colours. The flowers are pollinated by butterflies.

In Britain hoary stock is considered to be endangered in the wild.

The flowers emit a strong, sweet scent in the early evening.

Incana is Latin (hoary or greyish-white) with reference to the leaves.

Most of the familiar garden stocks are descended from this species which can still be seen growing uncultivated on the Isle of Wight off the southern coast of Britain. Hoary stocks were familiar to the 16th Century English Elizabethans who knew them then as Stock-gilliflower because of their carnation-like scent.

Hoary stocks are included in one modern British custom that takes place on Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday in the Christian calendar. This tradition recalls the days when certain herbs were carried in nosegays as a protection against disease (particularly plague) and also noxious odours. During the ceremony the Maundy money, usually a specially minted silver penny for every year of the monarch's age, is distributed by the Queen to elderly people. She herself is presented with a traditional nosegay that customarily contains daffodils *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, primroses *Primula vulgaris*, rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*, thyme *Thymus vulgaris*, sweet violet *Viola odorata* and white stock.

The flowers are not overlooked in poetry. The Englishman, John Gay (1685-1732) who is buried in Westminster Abbey with his own epitaph

Life is a jest, and all things show it;
I thought so once, and now I know it

and is probably best known today for his ballad-opera *The Beggar's Opera*, described them as

Fair is the gillyflower of garden sweet.

In some countries such as India the seeds of hoary stock are prized as an aphrodisiac.

Medicinally, 16th Century English Elizabethan herbalists recommended the plant for treating paralysis and piles, and also for easing childbirth pains. In India the seeds have been used in treatments for cancer, stomach disorders and poisonous bites.

It is the birthday flower for 10th October.