

Mesembryanthemum crystallinum

[Synonyms : *Cryophytum crystallinum*, *Gasoul crystallinum*, *Mesembryanthemum glaciale*]

ICE PLANT is a succulent annual. Native to South Africa (particularly the Cape) it has small, pale pink or whitish-petalled flowers.

It is also known as *Barrilla* (Canary Island), *Buz otu* (Turkish), Common iceplant, Crystalline ice plant, *Cristalloide* (Italian), *Diacciola* (Italian), Diamond, *Eiskraut-Mittagsblume* (German), *Erba cristallina* (Italian), Ficoides, Fig marigold, *Glaciale* (French), Hottentot fig, *Isört* (Swedish), *Jääpäivikki* (Finnish), *Kosmatc krystalový* (Czech), *Kristallina tar-ramel* (Maltese), Sea fig, Sea marigold, Silvery-leaved mesembryanthemum, Soda plant, Viggie, and Wax pink; and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of idleness, and ‘your looks freeze me’.

Crystallinum is derived from Greek *crystallo-* (ice) component meaning ‘crystalline, glistening’ with reference to the watery glands on the leaf surface.

On the one hand some authorities declare that this was one of the plants believed by the Romans to be able to give protection against lightning – and on the other there are those authorities who report that the plant was introduced both to Europe and to North America in the 18th Century as a spinach-like (*Spinacia oleracea*) vegetable. (Surely the credibility of the former should be doubted in view of the plant’s homeland and the latter is also a little puzzling, unless it is referring to cooking methods, as unlike spinach these leaves are fleshy and densely covered in crystalline hairs.)