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Mirabilis jalapa

[Synonyms : *Mirabilis dichotoma*, *Mirabilis jalapa* subsp. *lindheimeri*, *Mirabilis lindheimeri*, *Mirabilis odorata*, *Mirabilis uniflora*, *Nyctago jalapa*]

FOUR O’CLOCK is a perennial (annual in temperate climates). Native to tropical America it has small, faintly fragrant, sometimes blotched, white, pink, red or yellow flowers with long protruding stamens.

It is also known as *Andhimalligai* (Tamil), *Antimalari* (Malayalam), *Ban yen* (Thai), *Belle de nuit* (French), *Bunga pukul empat* (Malay), *Chandrakanta* (Telugu), *Clavilia* (English, German), *False jalap*, *Flower of Peru*, *Four o’clock plant*, *Garten-Wunderblume* (German), *Gulabash* (Hindi), *Hummejr* (Maltese), *Jalap*, *Jalap plant*, *Japanische Wunderblume* (German), *Kambang pagi sore* (Javanese), *Krishnakeli* (Bengali, Sanskrit), *Marvel of Peru*, *Marvel of the world*, *Nocenka zahradní* (Czech), *Pretty by night*, *Ŝajnjlapo* (Esperanto), *Scented false jalap*, *Sendrikka* (Sinhalese), *Underblomma* (Swedish), *Wunderblume* (German), *Wunder von Peru* (German), and *Zèb katrè* (Creole): and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of timidity.

The flowers open late afternoon through to the following morning when they fade.

Warning – roots and seeds may be poisonous and they can cause skin irritation, stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Jalapa means ‘of or from Jalapa (or Xalapan, north of Veracruz in Mexico)’.

This is not the source of ‘jalap’ used by the pharmaceutical industry. That is provided by the unrelated Jalap (*Ipomoea purga*).

Steeped in water the flowers yield an edible crimson dye used especially in China to colour seaweed jellies, cakes and confectionery.

In Japan (and China, South Korea and Malaysia) the ground seeds are used to make face powder, while in other tropical countries the tiny leathery black fruit are strung to make necklaces.

Apparently four o’clock was introduced to Europe through Spain, from Peru, in about 1525.

Medicinally, the plant has had some value. In addition to the Hawaiians, Indians have prized the roots as an aphrodisiac. In India and the Indonesian island of Java, the bruised leaves have been applied to boils and abscesses in poultices.