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Narthecium ossifragum

[Synonyms : *Anthericum ossifragum*, *Asphodelus lancastriae verus*, *Asphodelus luteus*, *Narthecium anthericoides*]

BOG ASPHODEL is a perennial. Native to Europe it has small, orange-centred yellow flowers that turn deep orange as the fruit ripen.

It is also known as Cruppany grass, King's spear, *Liliovec kostilomka* (Czech), Limmerick, *Llafyn y Bladur* (Welsh), Maiden's hair, Moor-golds, Moor-grass, *Myrlilja* (Swedish), and Yellow grass; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of death, eternity, and 'my regrets follow you to the end of the world'.

Warning – all parts of bog asphodel are potentially poisonous for animals, particularly sheep and cattle, and can cause kidney damage and photosensitivity.

Ossifragum is derived from Latin *ossis* (bone) and *frango* (brittle, breakable, crumbly, loose) components meaning 'bone-breaking' with reference to a past belief that bog asphodel was responsible for the brittle bones of cattle (or other animals) that ate it.

The Asphodel in the common name comes from a Greek word *asphodelus* that was the name given by the Greeks to the original asphodel plant (of the same family) to which bog asphodel bears some resemblance.

Greek mythology tells how its flowers covered a couch for Zeus and Hera even though it grew in the Underworld and therefore symbolized death.

In an Anglo-Saxon translation of the *Herbarium* [written by the Roman poet, satirist, philosopher and orator, Lucius Apuleius (c.124-around 170) who was widely travelled] reference is made to *hastula regia* (King's spear) indicating that the plant has long been known in England. The root was eaten there in the Middle Ages when it was spoken of as 'food for a king', and later on the plant was used as a substitute for saffron (*Crocus sativus*). But in the 17th Century it was collected from the moorland in England and used as a yellow hair dye.

It is the birthday flower for 13th July.