

*Nymphaea alba*

[Synonyms : *Nymphaea candida*, *Nymphaea minoriflora*, *Nymphaea nelumbo alba*, *Nymphaea occidentalis*]

**WHITE WATER LILY** is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to Asia, Europe (including Britain) and the Mediterranean, it has large slightly fragrant, pink-tinged, white flowers with many golden stamens.

It is also known as Bobbins, *Brimposh* (Kashmiri), Cambie-leaf, Can-dock, Can-leaf, European white lily, European white water lily, Flatterdock, Floating dock, *Grzybienia biale* (Polish), *Hvid Åkande* (Danish), *Isolumme* (Finnish), Lady of the lake, *Leknín bílý* (Czech), *Lekno biele* (Slovak), *Lili-ddŵr Wen* (Welsh), Lough lily, *Lumme* (Finnish), *Nenúfar blanco* (Spanish), *Nénuphar blanc* (French), *Nimfeo blanka* (Esperanto), *Ninfea comune* (Italian), *Nufăr alb* (Rumanian), *Nymphéa blanc* (French), *Seerose* (German), *Sjöblad* (Swedish), Swan amongst the flowers, *Sydnäckros* (Swedish), *Valkolumme* (Finnish), *Vit näckros* (Swedish), *Wasserrose* (German), Waterbells, Waterblob, *Waterlelie* (Dutch), Water lily, Water rose, *Weisse Seerose* (German), *Weisse Teichrose* (German), and White pond lily.

The seeds contain air in their coating which enables them to float.

Flowers are pollinated by small beetles.

White water lily must not be confused with the potentially poisonous American, tuberous water lily (*Nymphaea odorata* subsp. *tuberosa*).

*Alba* means 'white'.

The leaves were once eaten as a vegetable and the tubers were roasted or ground down and boiled like potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*). The white water lily was also used once by the French as an ingredient in making beer.

This plant is cultivated widely as an ornamental.

In some countries the underground stems are fed to pigs.

The fresh root used to provide an alternative for soap. In Ireland a dye was extracted from the roots, and in the Scottish Highlands this dye was used to colour wool a bluish-black.

One English poet who expressed the delights of the flower was the lesser known John Hamilton Reynolds (1796-1852). He wrote a verse that begins with the lines

In a brook which loved to fret  
O'er yellow sand and pebble blue,  
The lily of the silvery hue  
All freshly dwelt, with white leaves wet.

.....

At about the same time Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) wrote

.....

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,  
And slips into the bosom of the lake;  
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip  
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

It has been proved now that white water lily can be used to depress sexual activity.

Coincidentally the Chinese have achieved this with two other family members, lotus

(*Nelumbo nucifera*) and *Euryale ferox*, which suggests for various authorities that they may have some common constituents.

Although rarely used in Western medicine internally today it (like the American white pond lily, *Nymphaea odorata*) used to be recommended by herbalists for treating fevers, soothing pain and easing blisters. The roots were also taken in red wine as a treatment for leucorrhoea and with the seeds (or flowers in India) would be eaten with broth or meat as an aphrodisiac. Indians have used the root to treat dysentery, and they have taken an infusion of fruit and flowers for diarrhoea as well.