

*Onobrychis viciifolia*

[Synonyms : *Hedysarum onobrychis*, *Onobrychis alba*, *Onobrychis sativa*, *Onobrychis viciaefolia*]

**SAINFOIN** (English, French) is a perennial. Native to Asia it has pea-like pink-striped or pink flowers.

It is also known as Baby's cradles, Cock's head, Common sainfoin, Esparcet, *Esparceta* (Spanish), *Esparcette* (Dutch, French), *Esparsett* (Swedish), *Esparsette* (German), *Esparzeta* (Portuguese), French grass, *Futter-Esparsette* (German), *Helghö* (Swedish), Holy clover, Holy hay, *Lupinella* (Italian), Medick fitch, *Onobriko kultiva* (Esperanto), *Pipirigallo* (Spanish), Red flitching, *Saat-Esparsette* (German), Saint-foin, Sandfain, *Sanfeno* (Portuguese), Thatch, *Vičenec ligrus* (Czech), *Vičenec setý* (Czech), and *Vičenec vikolistý* (Slovak); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of agitation, 'trust in God', and 'you confuse me'.

The flowers open progressively from the base to the spike tip.

*Viciifolia* is made up of the genus name *Vicia* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'with vetch-like leaves'.

The name Sainfoin is understood to have been adopted in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century from the French.

Although some authorities have suggested that this name means 'holy hay' it is believed that the actual meaning is 'wholesome hay'.

Sainfoin was introduced to Britain from France.

In Christian legend it is said that the hay in the manger in Bethlehem on which the head of the sleeping baby Jesus (c. 6BC-c. 30AD) lay started to sprout with the pink flowers of sainfoin.

For some authorities this plant was one of the Nine Sacred Herbs (referred to as 'Atterlothe') mentioned in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century herbal known as the *Lacnunga*. The others are thought to have been chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), crab apple (*Malus baccata*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare var. dulce*), greater plantain (*Plantago major*), mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) (or wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) and wood betony (*Stachys officinalis*), together with one other claimant to this honour garden chervil (*Anthriscus cereifolium*). The Anglo-Saxons believed these could give protection against evil.

In the past the plant has been fed to cattle to increase milk production.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend sainfoin for the treatment of boils.

It is the birthday flower for 7<sup>th</sup> August.