

Polygala vulgaris

[Synonyms : *Polygala oxyptera*, *Polygala sibirica*]

COMMON MILKWORT is an evergreen perennial. Native to Europe (including Britain) and to the Mediterranean it has small blue (occasionally pink, yellowish or white) flowers.

It is also known as Cross flower, European milkwort, European seneka, Fairy soap, Four sisters, Gang flower, *Gewöhnliches Kreuzblümchen* (German), Hedge hyssop, *Herbe de paralysie* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Horčinka obyčajná* (Slovak), Jack-and-the-beanstalk, *Jungfrulin* (Swedish), *Llysiaw Crist* (Welsh), Milkwort, Mother Mary's milk, *Polygale* (French), Procession flower, Purple milkwort, Robin's eye, Rogation flower, Senega snakeroot, Shepherd's thyme, *Vítod obecný* (Czech), and Waxworks; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of hermitage.

Warning – overdoses can cause nausea, vomiting and gastric inflammation.

Vulgaris means 'common'.

Many of the common names are tied in with English traditions going back to the 1st Century and to Ascension Day, together with the three preceding Rogation Days (also known in the past as Gang Days) in the Christian calendar of the Anglican Church. At this time children would 'gang' round the parish or district of the local church beating the bounds (boundaries). They would be accompanied on the walk by clergy, other parish officials and 'charity children' and the latter carried a pole garlanded with common milkwort and other flowers. When the group reached various points on the boundary line the boys would be beaten with willow wands (*Salix*) to teach them the limits of the parish's area.

Traditionally milkworts have been supposed to be able to increase milk yield but this has never been proved.

Medicinally, common milkwort was once used as a preventative or remedy for paralysis.

Although it can be used in the treatment of some lung complaints (and has been used in this capacity in Chinese medicine) it has been proved ineffectual as a remedy for asthma.