

Polygonatum multiflorum

[Synonyms : *Convallaria multiflora*, *Polygonatum x hybridum*]

SOLOMON'S-SEAL is a perennial. Native to Asia and Europe (including Britain) it has small creamy or greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Common Solomon's seal, David's harp, Dropberry, Fraxinell, Jacob's ladder, Job's tears, *Kokorik* (Slovak), *Kokořík mnohokvětý* (Czech), Ladder to heaven, Lady's lockets, Lady's seals, *Lehtokielo* (Finnish), Lily of the mountain, Our Lady's belfry, *Plieurs de Jâcob* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), St. Mary's seal, *Sceau de Salomon* (French), Sealroot, Sealwort, *Sello de Salomon* (Spanish), *Sêl Solomon* (Welsh), *Sigillo di Salamone* (Italian), Solomon's heal, Sow's tits, *Stor Konval* (Danish), *Storrams* (Swedish), Vagabond's friend, *Vielblütige Weisswurz* (German), *Weusswurz* (German), White root, and White wort.

Warning – all parts of the plant may be poisonous. It can cause blurred vision, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and heart distress. It may be poisonous for some animals.

Multiflorum is derived from Latin *multi-* (many) and *-flora* (flower) components meaning 'many flowered'.

Several reasons have been identified for the derivation of the common name Solomon's-seal.

One among them is that the round scars on the roots could resemble a six-pointed star known to the Arabs as Solomon's-seal, and another is that the cross-section of cut roots has the appearance of Hebrew characters. Yet another explanation by John Gerard (1545-1612) the English, barber-surgeon and herbalist, suggested that it celebrated the plant's ability to seal up wounds and broken bones. Then another reason put forward is that the flower if lightly dipped in ink and pressed on paper (like a seal) produces a six-pointed star similar in shape to the Jewish Star of David (or the Arabian Solomon's Seal). The star is also an ancient Hindu symbol of supreme power – and so the possible explanations go on

An old legend describes how King Solomon helped the quarrymen when they could not make any impression on the extremely hard rock which was being excavated for the Temple.

With only the plant to help him he ripped out blocks of stone from the cliff faces.

A curious belief in German folklore (similar to that held by the English for the cowslip,

Primula veris and primrose, *Primula vulgaris*) contends that Solomon's-seal is a key to underground treasure chambers.

It was said that painters and poets obtainsome of their inspiration by inhaling the flowers.

In some European countries the young shoots have been cooked and eaten like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*), particularly in Turkey. The root and the flowers were considered to be aphrodisiacs and could also be found as ingredients in love potions and philtres. They were included in snuff because of their high reputation for causing sneezing which was believed to be able to ease headaches and other disorders.

Galen (c.130-c.201) the distinguished Greek physician who during his lifetime ministered to Roman Emperors and whose medicinal teachings were to influence European practitioners for at least 1500 years, wrote that a distillation of the whole plant was used cosmetically for the complexion, particularly by ladies in Roman society.

In veterinary medicine the root was sometimes an ingredient in treatments for ailing cattle.

Medicinally, the root was used for treating respiratory ailments, dysentery, piles and stomach and bowel inflammation, as well as for healing wounds, external inflammation, broken bones and bruising, and for treating vomiting, and baldness. Leaves and roots were also used in different forms to ease black eyes. A decoction of root also gained a reputation as a remedy for some skin ailments, particularly those caused by poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*).