

Polygonum persicaria

[Synonyms : *Persicaria maculata*, *Persicaria maculosa*, *Persicaria mite*, *Persicaria mitis*, *Polygonum maculatum*]

REDSHANK is an annual. Native to northern temperate regions it has tiny greenish, magenta or pink flowers.

It is also known as Adam's plaster, *Åkerpilört* (Swedish), Alice, Arsemart, Arsesmart, *Asbat-ar-râi* (Arabic), Black heart, *Bleknäa* (Swedish), Common persicaria, Common persicary, Crab's claw, *Dail y Groes* (Welsh), Devil's pinch, Doorweed, *Durazrillo comun* (Spanish), *Elinog Goch* (Welsh), *Erva pessegueira* (Portuguese), *Fersken-pileurt* (Danish), *Flóajurt* (Icelandic), *Floh-Knöterich* (German), *FlöhKraut* (German), Gander grass, *Hanhentatar* (Finnish), *Harilik kirburohi* (Estonian), Heartease, Heartspot knotweed, Heartweed, *Hierba pejiquera* (Spanish), *Hónsegras* (Norwegian), Kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate, Knotweed, Lady's pinch, Lady's thumb, Lakeweed, Lamb's tongues, Lover's pride, *Nghě bun* (Vietnamese), Peachwort, *Persicaire douce* (French), *Persicaria* (English, Italian), *Perzikkruid* (Dutch), *Pfirsichblättriger Knöterich* (German), *Pied rouge* (French), Pig grass, *Pilört* (Swedish), *Pimentilla* (Spanish), Pinchweed, Pinkweed, *Poligono persicaria* (Italian), *Rdest plamisty* (Polish), Red joints, Red knees, Redleg, Redweed, *Renouée persicaire* (French), Saucy alice, Smartweed, Sourock, Spotted arsesmart, Spotted knotweed, Spotted ladysthumb, Spotted smartweed, Spotted persicaria, Stoneweed, Useless, *Vanlig åkerpilört* (Swedish), Virgin Mary's pinch, Willow-weed, and Yellowin girse; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of restoration.

Warning – the plant is considered to be potentially poisonous and is said to be able to cause dermatitis.

Persicaria is made up of the genus name *Persicaria* meaning 'like plants in that genus'.

In Christian lore one of the popular legends tells how Christ's blood fell on the leaves of the plant as it grew at the foot of the Cross and this caused the dark triangular marks on the leaves. Another accounts for this marking by a very sad little story in which it was described how the Virgin Mary habitually prepared a special ointment from redshank and could not find any of the plant when she needed it. Later she came across some when her need was no longer urgent and in her annoyance not only relegated redshank to the status of a weed but also left an impression of her finger on the leaf. It was said that from then on the plant was the only one for which there was no use.

Country folk in areas such as the Shetland Islands have used redshank for a yellow dye.

For a few North American Indian tribes redshank was a source of medicine. While the Iroquois Indians took the plant for some heart problems and applied a plant decoction externally for rheumatism, Cherokee Indians used it to treat pain and some urinary problems, and the Chippewa tribe prescribed it for stomach upsets.

The plant was also used in North American Indian veterinary medicine. The Iroquois tribe rubbed the plant over their horses to keep flies at bay.

Followers of the Doctrine of Signatures believed that persicaria was associated with the liver. Medicinally, herbalists once used it for the internal treatment of jaundice, asthma, fevers, piles and varicose veins, and the external treatment of ulcers and toothache. In France today it

is still used in folk medicine and also in the United States where it is added in infusion to hot baths in order to ease rheumatism. It is also used in homoeopathy.