

Ranunculus ficaria

[Synonyms : *Ficaria ranunculooides*, *Ficaria verna*, *Ranunculus ficaria* var. *bulbifera*, *Ranunculus fluitans*]

LESSER CELANDINE is an invasive mat-forming perennial. Native to North Africa, western Asia and to Europe, it has small glossy, golden-yellow flowers that are green beneath.

It is also known as Bachelor's buttons, Brighteye, Burwort, Butter, Butter and cheese, Butterbump, Butterchops, Butterchurn, Buttercrease, Butter-daisy, Butter flower, Butter rose, Caltrops, Celandine, *Celidonia menor* (Portuguese), Cheesecups, Cowslip, Crain, Crazy, Crazy bet, Crazy cup, Crazyweed, Cream and butter, Crowd support herb, Crowfoot, Crowpightle, Crowtoe, Cups, Dalecup, Dellcup, Dewcup, Dillcup, Fairies' basins, *Feigwurz* (German), *Ficaire* (French), *Ficaire commun en forêt* (French), *Ficaire fausse renoncule* (French), *Ficária* (Portuguese), Figwort, Figwort buttercup, Five o'clock flower, Foalfoot, Fogwort, *Fomm il-gheliem* (Maltese), Foxwort, Frog's foot, *Frühlings-Scharbockskraut* (German), Gentleman's cap and frills, Gilcup, Gildcup, Giltycup, Glennies, Gold balls, Goldcrap, Goldencup, Golden guineas, Golden knop, Golden stars, Goldweed, Goldy, Goldy knob, Golland, Hemorrhoid herb, Kenningworth, Kingcup, King's clover, King's cob, King's evil, Lawyerweed, Legwort, *Llygad Ebrill* (Welsh), Marybuds, Marsh pilewort, Maybuds, *Morrhouiton* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Mukulaleinikki* (Finnish), Old man's buttons, Paigles, Pilewort, *Pissenliette* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Powerwort, *Scharbockskraut* (German), Sitsicker, Small celandine, Smallwort, Soldier buttons, *Speenkruid* (Dutch), Spring messenger, Starflower, Starlight, *Svalört* (Swedish), Teacups, Yellow caul, Yellow creams, Yellow crees, Yellowcup, and Yellow gollan; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'joys to come'.

The flowers (which pale with age) follow the sun and close before rain.

They are pollinated by various insects especially bees and flies.

Warning – the sap of the fresh plant is poisonous. It can cause burning lips and tongue, nausea, stomach-ache, vomiting, diarrhoea, haemorrhage, loss of balance, impaired vision, convulsions, coma and death. Skin irritation can be caused by handling the bruised plant. The plant has poisoned sheep and cattle.

Lesser celandine has a similar appearance to buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) which only has 5-petalled flowers.

It is not related to greater celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) which belongs to a different family. *Ficaria* is derived from the genus name *Ficus* meaning 'like the shape of the fruit/receptacle in that (fig) genus' with reference in this case to the tuberous roots.

The lesser celandine did not escape superstitious English practices. Together with a mole's heart it was said to be able to give protection against enemies and lawsuits if carried on one's person. While for some farmers the likeness of its roots to cows' teats (surely shades of the dogma enshrined in the once favoured Doctrine of Signatures) justified hanging lesser celandine's roots in the cowshed to encourage rich milk.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) had a fondness for the lesser celandine – so much so that upon the English poet's death the blooms were carved upon his tomb.

In Sweden and other parts of Europe the stems and young leaves (which are not particularly appetizing) have been boiled and eaten as a vegetable. The tuberous roots have also been included in salads.

Like other species of the same family the plant's acrid juice was once sought out by beggars to create sores on their skin with the expectation of gaining sympathy when begging for alms. Subsequently they often cured these blisters by an application of great mullein leaves (*Verbascum thapsus*).

The shape of the tubers for European herbalists who followed the dogma of the Doctrine of Signatures in the 16th Century suggested a resemblance to piles and thereupon with ungrounded success promoted the use of the plant for treating that ailment. (In the past in the Netherlands this perceived likeness led to them being worn like a charm by anyone suffering from piles as an adequate cure in itself.) It was also used in remedies for jaundice, tuberculosis (a form of which attracted the name 'King's evil') and warts, and children used to rub their teeth with the leaves in order to whiten them. The leaves were also used in treatments for scurvy. However the tuber's poisonous and acrid juice is not favoured in folk medicine today except as an ingredient in ointments that are only used externally.

It is the birthday flower for 22nd July.