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### *Reseda odorata*

**MIGNONETTE** (English, French) is an evergreen perennial (grown as an annual). Native to North Africa (especially Egypt) it has small fragrant, greenish-white flowers with orange-brown stamens.

It is also known as Bastard rocket, Common mignonette, Garden mignonette, *Garten-Resede* (German), *Khuzam* (Arabic), Little darling, Love flower, *Luktreseda* (Swedish), *Reseda* (Swedish), *Rezeda voňavý* (Slovak), *Rezeda vonná* (Czech), *Rezedo bonodora* (Esperanto), *Rýt vonný* (Czech), Sweet reseda, *Tuoksureseda* (Finnish), and *Wohlriechende Reseda* (German); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of health, ‘you are better than handsome’, ‘your qualities are supreme’, and ‘your qualities surpass your charms’.

*Odorata* is derived from Latin *odor* (scent, smell, odour) meaning ‘scented or fragrant’.

Some authorities say that mignonette was introduced to Britain in 1742 and from there it was eventually introduced to North America as well.

Many believe mignonette’s popularity in Europe began at the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) who was emperor of France, is said to have sent seeds collected locally back to his wife, Joséphine in France in 1798 at the height of his Egyptian campaign. (Apparently the English allowed them through their blockade – with a display of chivalry in this instance that would be unlikely to be seen today.) The seeds were cultivated and are believed to have graced the drawing rooms of Malmaison as pot plants, and as Malmaison was a focus for French society at that time mignonette itself became fashionable there.

Today essential oil extracted from mignonette is used in perfumery.

In Europe some thought that if you rolled three times in a bed of mignonette before embarking on a courtship good fortune would be yours.

Today this cottage-garden plant is primarily grown for the scent of its flowers which also attracts bees – and it makes a good honey.

D H Lawrence (1885-1930), the well-known English novelist, poet, and essayist, celebrated mignonette in his poem *Red Geranium and Godly Mignonette*.

..... even God could not imagine the redness of a red geranium  
nor the smell of mignonette  
when geraniums were not, and mignonette neither.  
And even when they were, even God would have to have a nose  
to smell at the mignonette. ....

Medicinally, the plant used to be applied to inflammation and swellings, and it was believed (certainly in Britain) that any health-giving properties were enhanced by spitting on the ground and reciting a special incantation three times.

It is the birthday flower for 30<sup>th</sup> January.