

Rosa eglantheria

[Synonyms : *Rosa glutinosa*, *Rosa lutea*, *Rosa rubiginosa*, *Rosa rubiginosa*]

SWEET-BRIAR is a spreading, prickly deciduous shrub. Native to Britain and continental Europe (from southern Scandinavia and Spain eastwards to the Caucasus and western Asia), it has small sweetly fragrant, bright pink (rarely white) flowers.

It is also known as *Äppelros* (Swedish), Apple rose, *Drysen Bêr* (Welsh), *Egelantier* (Dutch), *Eglanterio* (Esperanto), Eglantine, Eglantine rose, Hip brier, Hip rose, Kitchen rose, Primrose, *Rose sauvage* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Rosier de chien* (French), *Rosier rouillé* (French), *Růže vinná* (Czech), *Schottische Zaunrose* (German), Sweetbriar rose, Sweetbrier, and *Weinrose* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of genius, ‘I wound to heal’, poetry, simplicity, and talent.

The flowers produce both nectar and pollen.

Eglantheria is a corruption of French Provençal *aiglent* itself derived from Latin *aculeatus* (provided with prickles or stings).

It was the glossy bright red hips of sweet-briar which were used in England to flavour the then popular medieval mead.

The rose is mentioned in many English literary works. In one of Edmund Spenser’s (c.1552-1599) *Sonnets* he wrote

Sweet is the eglantine, but pricketh nere.

There are references to sweet-briar (as eglantine) in two of the plays written by his peer, William Shakespeare (1564-1616). In the comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Oberon addresses Puck with the words

.....nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine;

while in *Cymbeline* he writes

.....thou shalt not lack
The flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azur’d hare-bell, like thy veins’ no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
Out-sweetened not thy breath;

And it is thought that this rose was the focus of Robert Herrick’s (1591-1634) words

From this bleeding hand of mine
Take this sprig of eglantine,
Which, though sweet unto your smell,
Yet the fretful briar will tell,
He who plucks the sweets shall prove
Many thorns to be in love.

Sweet-briar is thought to have been one of the twelve or so species introduced to North America (particularly Virginia) by early European settlers. Today it can be seen growing in the Palace Gardens of the Governor at Williamsburg. Apparently despite few months without frost sweet-briar was successfully introduced to Newfoundland in the early 1990s.

Today it is primarily grown as a hedging plant.

It is no longer used medicinally except in a few countries for the treatment of diarrhoea and wind.

It is the birthday flower for 29th March.