

*Rosa gallica*

[Synonyms : *Rosa ecae*, *Rosa officinalis*, *Rosa provincialis*, *Rosa rubra*]

**FRENCH ROSE** is a prickly deciduous shrub. Native to western Asia and to Europe it has small fragrant, pink or crimson flowers.

It is also known as *Essigrose* (German), *Gallicarose* (German), *Gallische Rose* (German), *Gulap* (Bengali, Hindi), Provence rose, *Provinsros* (Swedish), Provins rose, *Ranskanruusu* (Finnish), Red Provins rose, Red rose, Rose of Gaul, Rose of Provins, *Růže galská* (Czech), *Růže keltská* (Czech), and *Warda taz-zeit* (Maltese).

*Gallica* means ‘of or from France’.

Because the colour (term) ‘pink’ was not adopted until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the French rose can often be found described as ‘red’.

The French rose was familiar to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century BC Median fire worshippers of Persia (now Iran) who cultivated them for their religious ceremonies, and it had also been known centuries earlier to the ancient Greeks.

It is thought by many to be one of the few roses cultivated in Roman times, is the parent of many of today’s hybrids, and according to some authorities is likely to be an ancestor of the modern European garden rose. It is also the only red rose that is native to Europe. The Romans are believed to have ‘paved’ streets with its petals ahead of parading victors, used them to carpet banqueting floors, and adorned both wedding couples and statues almost indiscriminately with them. Some authorities suspect that it was their ‘Rose of Miletus’ and today’s rose experts are convinced that it is the rose that is described by the Roman natural historian, Pliny (23-79).

French rose has been cultivated in Britain for centuries but the date of its introduction there is uncertain. Authorities debate whether it came to those Islands during their Roman occupation (bearing in mind the medicinal respect it attracted) or it crossed from the mainland a little later in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century with the Benedictine monks.

At some point French rose was introduced to North America where records show that the Mahuna Indian tribe absorbed it into their medicinal repertoire as they used it to treat fevers and chills.

The petals have been used in perfumes for centuries.

As a medicinal plant Roman military herbalists held it in such high regard that they unwittingly established it in most of the countries that were overrun by the Roman armies. The French rose accompanied them virtually wherever they went and was planted inside their fortified camps. Today astringent preparations made from the dried petals are used medicinally.