

*Rubus fruticosus*

[Synonyms : *Rubus bergii*, *Rubus myrianthus*, *Rubus plicatus*]

**BLACKBERRY** is a prickly, deciduous or semi-evergreen, biennial or perennial shrub. Native to Europe and the Mediterranean it has small sweetly scented, white to pink flowers. It is also known as *Alish* (Punjabi), Blackbides, Black blegs, Black kites, Black spice, Bly, *Braam* (Dutch), Bramble, Brambleberry, Bramble blackberry, Bramble-kite, Brameberry, Brammel kites, Brier, *Brombeere* (German), Brummel, Bumble-kite, Cock-brumble, Country lawyers, Doctor's medicine, *Echte Brombeere* (German), European blackberry, Gatterberry, *Gewone braam* (Dutch), Hawk's bill bramble, He-brimmel, *Kroatzbeere* (German), Lady's garters, Lawyers, *Mouaithes* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Mulberries, *Mûre* (French), Mushes, *Mwyaren Ddu* (Welsh), *Ostružina černicová* (Slovak), *Ostružiník křovitý* (Czech), *Poimuvatukka* (Finnish), *Ronce* (French), *Ronce frutescente* (French), *Ronche* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Scaldhead, Shrubby blackberry, *Sötbjörnbär* (Swedish), Thief, *Vatos* (Greek), and *Vatsinya* (Greek); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of death, envy, grief, holiness, lowliness, pain, remorse, 'riches that destroy the soul', 'that which holds the rose and beauty of soul', weariness, and wickedness.

Various cultivated varieties of blackberry are grown today.

*Fruticosus* is derived from Latin *frutico* (to shoot out, become bushy).

Authorities believe that reference to lawyers in some of the common names relies on a view that once you are enmeshed by them (the lawyers) it is difficult to free yourself.

Blackberry seeds have been found by archaeologists in the remains of Neolithic man (2700-1900 BC).

The blackberry is surrounded with superstition and tradition. An arch of the blackberry bush had medicinal virtues for humans and animals alike. One practice was for whooping-cough sufferers. In some localities this could be cured by passing the patient through the arch seven times with the words

In bramble, out cough.

Here I leave the whooping cough.

In England superstition had it that the devil fell into a blackberry bush when he was thrown out of heaven by St. Michael (today the patron saint of grocers, paratroopers and policemen) on 9<sup>th</sup> October and cursed and spat on the fruit. As a result from the 11<sup>th</sup> October (the Old Michaelmas Day) it was unlucky to eat the fruit – this date varied slightly in different parts of the Country according to local tradition and it also embraced the new and current Michaelmas Day on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

Then one delightful legend tells how the cormorant as a wool merchant joined with the bat and the bramble to finance a large shipment of wool. Unfortunately the ship foundered before it reached harbour and all three were destitute. From then on the cormorant has persisted in diving into the sea to find the lost cargo, the bat hides until midnight to escape its creditors, and the bramble grabs wool from passing sheep to replace his share of the loss.

For the Hebrews the blackberry signifies the voice of God and divine love. For others the burning bush (mentioned in the Old Testament of the *Bible*) was a bramble bush while in Christian lore the blackberry represents Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

There are four or five references to blackberry by the famous English bard, William Shakespeare (1564-1616). For instance Falstaff declaims in Part I of *Henry IV* ..... Give you a reason on compulsion! - if reasons were as plenty as blackberries, I would give no man a reason on compulsion, I.

An orange dye can be obtained from the roots, while the shoots will give a greyish-black with an iron mordant, and greyish-black dyes can also be obtained from the berries.

Hedgerows are one of the wild blackberry's favourite haunts and many of these have been lost during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (particularly in Britain) as a result of urbanization or changes in agricultural practice. Yet it has been noted that blackberry picking in the Autumn is one of the few remaining traditional seasonal activities in Western Industrial Europe.

In the kitchen the glossy black berry-fruit are still an ingredient in jams, preserves, puddings and syrups, as well as in wines and vinegars. The fruit are also used today on a commercial scale by the food industry (especially for making jam) and by the drinks industry for colouring wine and making liqueur, and in Germany for preparing *Brombeerwasser* too.

Birds are very fond of the fruit. In Britain at least 17 species of bird have been recorded feasting upon them and of these it seems that the blackbird is the most common partaker. Blackberry is also attractive to butterflies.

At some point blackberry reached North America where Micmac Indians absorbed it into their medicinal repertoire and used bark and roots to ease diarrhoea in their children.

Medicinally, the old cultures relied upon the fruit and flowers especially as an antidote for snake bites. The leaves were also used (sometimes accompanied by recitation) and were placed on swellings, inflammation and burns. The Romans only used certain parts of the plant and their treatments included a decoction of the roots in wine for oral ailments. While later English herbalists maintained many of the Roman remedies, their faith in the plant's healing qualities extended to all parts of it – and a leaf tea became a traditional cure for indigestion with the added advantage apparently of being a reliable blood purifier.

It is the birthday flower for 19<sup>th</sup> July.