

Succisa pratensis

[Synonyms : *Scabiosa succisa*, *Succisa praemorsa*]

DEVIL'S-BIT SCABIOUS is a perennial. Native to North Africa, Europe and western Siberia, it has dark violet-blue (occasionally pink or white) flowers with conspicuous stamens.

It is also known as Angel's pincushion, *Ängsvädd* (Swedish), Bachelor's buttons, Bee flower, Bitin Billy, Blue ball, Blue bobs, Blue bonnets, Blue buttons, Blue cap, Blue heads, Blue kiss, Blue tops, Bobby bright buttons, Bundweed, *Čertkus luční* (Czech), *Čertkus lúčny* (Slovak), Curl-doddy, *Caswenwyn* (Welsh), *Clafrllys Gwreidd-don* (Welsh), Devil's bit, Devil's button, *Escabiosa mordida* (Spanish), Fire leaves, Fore bit, Forebitten more, Gentleman's buttons, *Gewöhnlicher Teufelsabbiss* (German), Gipsy rose, Hardheads, Hog-a-back, *Knappvädd* (Swedish), Lamb's ears, *Mors du diable* (French), *Morso-diabolico* (Portuguese), Ofbit, Pincushions, Premorse scabious, Scabious, Stinking nancy, *Succise des prés* (French), *Teufelsabbiss* (German), and Woolly hardhead; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of unfortunate love.

Warning – some authorities view devil's-bit scabious as potentially poisonous. It can be injurious for animals. About 100 years ago in Britain a case of poisoning was reported in which the tongues of cattle had been injured. Since then no other case of any poisoning from devil's-bit scabious has been officially recorded in that Country.

Pratensis is derived from Latin *pratium* (meadow) meaning 'of or from meadows'.

Some species of scabious were once used in the treatment of skin irritations and the name Scabious is derived from a Latin word *scabies* meaning 'itch'. Like hoary plantain (*Plantago media*) the plant is said to have acquired the name Fire leaves because it was considered to be a possible fire hazard for farmers. Mid-19th Century records that mention English agricultural practice note how farmers were wont to pick a devil's-bit scabious leaf and twist it fiercely to see if any water emerged. Its thick leaves take time to dry out and if harvested among fresh hay while still moist could cause fermentation and in turn fire a rick

An old story relates how the devil found the plant in Paradise and realizing its potential for good bit off part of the blackish root to prevent man using it as a cure. This is said to explain the root's abruptly stunted appearance and accounts for some of its common names. The devil also featured in another superstition which claimed that he would appear at your bedside that night if you had picked devil's-bit scabious during the day.

The root used to be a source of green and yellow dyes.

In past centuries devil's-bit scabious was believed to be able to expel foreign bodies eg. arrowheads, broken bone, from the flesh. The root was used to cure skin diseases, as a preventative for plague and as a remedy for many varied types of poisoning (including rabies and snake bites). In addition herbalists used the plant to treat worms, wounds and dandruff. It was an ingredient in at least one remedy for the removal of freckles or pimples too. But above all else herbalists recommended it for treating coughs and fevers. This latter role still stands today although the plant is little used medicinally apart from in homoeopathic remedies as few consider it to be very helpful.

It is the birthday flower for 8th August.

