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Tagetes patula

[Synonyms : *Tagetes corymbosa*, *Tagetes remotiflora*, *Tagetes signata*, *Tagetes tenuifolia*]

FRENCH MARIGOLD is an annual. Native to Mexico it has small pungent-smelling, crimson- or red-marked, orange or yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Afrikán* (Czech), *Aksamitník rozkladitý* (Czech), Indian buttonhole, Marigold, *Niedrige Studentenblume* (German), *Qadīfah* (Arabic), *Ryhäsamettikukka* (Finnish), *Samie-poo* (Tamil), *Sammetsblomster* (Swedish), and *Studentenblume* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of jealousy.

Warning – the plant can cause dermatitis on some people.

Patula is Latin (standing open, lying open) meaning ‘spreading’.

The Inkas of South America considered the plant to be a ‘sacred weed’. They planted it among their potato crops (*Solanum tuberosum*) and were able to prevent attacks from eelworms which allowed them to grow the crops continuously in the same place.

In Mexico many centuries ago chickens’ skins and their eggs were coloured by adding french marigold petals to their feed.

It is believed that the french marigold was introduced to Britain by the Huguenots who were fleeing religious persecution on the European mainland in the 16th Century. Some records claim it bloomed in England for the first time on 24th August 1573, one year to the day following the slaughter of thousands of Huguenots in Paris (the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre). This flower took some time to become popular in the Islands as its disagreeable smell suggested to many that it must be poisonous but eventually it achieved popularity there and in the United States too during the 19th Century.

French marigold yields a yellow silk or wool dye.

Today french marigold can provide a flavouring for the food industry for baked and frozen products and relishes. It can also be used as a flavouring by the drinks industry in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

It is the birthday flower for 29th May.