

Trifolium repens

[Synonyms : *Amoria repens*, *Lotodes repens*, *Trifolium repens* var. *atropurpureum*, *Trifolium repens* var. *giganteum*]

WHITE CLOVER is a perennial. Native to Europe it has sweetly scented white or pinkish (occasionally purple) flowers that turn brown as they mature.

It is also known as Baa-lambs, Bee-bread, *Bian trèfle* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Bobby-roses, Broad grass, Claver, Common clover, Curl-doddy, *D'atelina plazivá* (Slovak), Dutch clover, Gowan, Honeystalks, Honeysuckle, Honeysuckle clover, *Jetelovec plazivý* (Czech), *Jetel plazivý* (Czech), *Kriechender Klee* (German), *Kriechender Weiss-Klee* (German), *Krypklöver* (Swedish), Ladino clover, Lamb sucklings, *Lämmer-Klee* (German), *Meillionen Wen* (Welsh), Mull, Mutton rose, Purplegrass, Purplewort, Pussy foot, Quillet, *Seamair bhan* (Gaelic), *Shaftal* (Punjabi), Shamrock, Sheep's gowan, *Smári* (Icelandic), Sucklings, Sucklers, Three-leaved grass, *Trèfle blanc* (French), *Trêfl'ye d'natuthe* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Valkoapila* (Finnish), *Vitklöver* (Swedish), *Vitvåppling* (Swedish), *Weiss-Klee* (German), White sookies, White trefoil, Wild white clover, and *Witte Klaver* (Dutch); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of loyalty, and 'think of me'.

The flowers are pollinated by bees especially honey-bees.

Warning – the whole of the plant is potentially poisonous for some animals (particularly pigs, horses and cattle) if consumed in large amounts.

Repens means 'creeping'.

Although the original 'shamrock' is generally considered to be black medick (*Medicago lupulina*) – or wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) which lost most of its popularity for this role in about 1830 – white clover is often used today or, to progressively lesser extents, white clover (*Trifolium repens*) or red clover (*Trifolium pratense*). The shamrock of whichever species is not an official Irish emblem (this is reserved for the 12-stringed harp) but it is registered under an international trade mark convention as an Irish symbol.. It is depicted however (representing Ireland) in the coat of arms of the United Kingdom and appears in the grass on which the shield rests. In North America street vendors have sold it there as the 'shamrock' on St. Patrick's Day (17th March).

When the Spanish conquistadores colonized South America in the 16th Century they also introduced several species of clover (including this one) and they established themselves quickly. European explorers and settlers also introduced it at the same time to the Eastern Seaboard of North America where it spread like wildfire. By the end of the 18th Century it had reached Kentucky and by then further East it had long been cultivated as a forage crop.

It was absorbed into the medicinal repertoire of several North American Indian tribes.

Mohicans used it to treat coughs and colds, and the Cherokee prescribed it for fever, some female disorders and kidney problems. In the Iroquois tribe the plant was valued for treating asthma and was applied as an eye-wash and a skin-wash.

Settlers arriving in New South Wales in 1788 introduced white clover to Australia. Here it is said to have held its own in the dryish Sydney area but thrived to the point sometimes of destroying native vegetation in the wetter region around Melbourne. On the other hand

colonists in New Zealand found that white clover introduced there needed to be replanted annually until the honey-bee was imported into the Country from 1839. Clover then made rapid progress and as in Australia was eventually began to smother many native plants. At the beginning of the 21st Century white clover continues to be grown for forage. Medicinally, herbalists have used it to treat gout, and according to some authorities have also included it in doubtful treatments for cancer.