

Tropaeolum majus

[Synonyms : *Cardaminum majus*, *Tropaeolum elatum*, *Tropaeolum hortense*, *Tropaeolum hybridum*, *Tropaeolum pinnatum*, *Tropaeolum quinquelobum*, *Trophaeum majus*]

NASTURTIUM is a perennial (grown as an annual). Native to South America (particularly Bolivia and Peru) it has large spurred, scented, often darker blotched, orange to white (occasionally red or mahogany) flowers.

It is also known as *Astuzia* (Italian), Canary creeper, *Cappucina* (Italian), *Capuchaon* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Capuchina* (Spanish), Capuchin cress, *Capucine* (French), *Capucine grande* (French), *Cresson d'Inde* (French), Garden nasturtium, Indian cress, *Indiankrasse* (Swedish), *Kapucinerkresse* (German), *Kapucínka väčšia* (Slovak), *Kapuzinerkresse* (German), *Köynnöskrassi* (Finnish), Large Indian cress, *Lichořeřišnice větší* (Czech), *Nasturzio* (Italian), *Nasturzio d'India* (Italian), *Oostindische Kers* (Dutch), *Tropeolo* (Italian), and Yellow lark's heel; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of patriotism, splendour (scarlet), and warlike trophy.

Oil (a drying oil similar to linseed, *Linum usitatissimum*) can be extracted from the seeds.

Warning – the seeds can be purgative in large quantities.

Majus is derived from Latin *maior* (greater) meaning 'greater, bigger or larger'.

It is said to owe its common name to its pungent scent as Nasturtium is derived from the Latin *nasus tortus* (distorted nose).

In the 16th Century the first species of nasturtium to enter Europe was brought to Spain from Peru. Records indicate that John Gerard (1545-1612) the English herbalist and barber-surgeon, received some seed from his herbalist friend, Jean Robin in Paris shortly after the flower's initial introduction to Europe. No doubt seeds were also sent elsewhere but the plant seems to have remained unknown in the rest of Europe until one of its close relatives was promoted as a medicine and vegetable in 1684.

The flower has a high content of phosphoric acid and some say that the core of the flower will give off sparks on a hot Summer day because of this.

In the kitchen the edible flowers and leaves can be added to salads, and the buds (and flowers) can be pickled like capers.

Medicinally, the nasturtium was used in remedies for scurvy. Today however it is rarely used. It is the birthday flower for 1st November.