

Viola tricolor

[Synonyms : *Viola arvensis*, *Viola bicolor*, *Viola curtisii*, *Viola macedonica*, *Viola saxatilis*, *Viola tenella*, *Viola tricolor* var. *hortensis*, *Viola variegata*]

WILD PANSY is an annual to perennial. Native to Europe and northern Asia it has small purple, white or yellow (individually or combined particularly yellowish) flowers with short spurs.

It is also known as *Ackerstiefmütterchen* (German), *Ackerveilchen* (German), *Äidinsilmä* (Finnish), Battlefield flower, Bidly's eyes, Bird's eye, Bouncing Bet, Black eye, Bullweed, Butterfly flower, Call-me-to-you, Cat's face, Coach-horse, Come-and-cuddle-me, Constancy, *Coucou d'jaonnière* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Cuddle me, Cuddle-me-to-you, Cull me, Cull me to you, Cupid's delight, Cupid's flower, *Dreifaltigkeitskraut* (German), *Driekleurig Viooltje* (Dutch), Eyebright, Fancy, *Fialka trojbarevná* (Czech), *Fialka trojfarebná* (Slovak), Field pansy, Flamy, Flower of thought, Flower o' luce, Forget-me-not, Garden gate, Garden violet, Gentleman-tailor, Godfathers and godmothers, Heart pansy, Heart's delight, Heartsease, Hearts in ease, Hens-and-roosters, Herb constancy, Herb trinitatis, Herb trinity, Horse violet, Jack-behind-the-garden-gate, Jack-jump-up-and-kiss-me, Johnnies, Johnny jumper, Johnny-jump-up, Jump-up, Jump-up-and-kiss-me, *Keto-orkki* (Finnish), Kiss-and-look-up, Kiss-at-the-garden-gate, Kiss behind the garden gate, Kiss-her-in-the-buttery, Kiss-her-in-the-pantry, Kiss-me, Kiss-me-at-the-garden-gate, Kiss-me-behind-the-garden-gate, Kiss-me-e're-I-rise, Kiss-me-love, Kiss-me-love-at-the-garden-gate, Kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate, Kiss-me-pink-of-my-Joan, Kiss me quick, Kit-run-about, Kit-run-in-the-fields, Kitty come, Kitty run, Kitty-run-the-street, Ladies' delight, Lark's eye, Leap-up-and-kiss-me, Little faces, Live-in-idleness, Love-a-li-do, Love-and-idle, Love idol, Love in idleness, Love-in-vain, Love-lies-bleeding, Lover's thoughts, Love true, Loving idol, Lowly down, *Lysiaúr Drindod* (Welsh), *Maceška* (Czech), Meet-her-in-the-entry-kiss-her-in-the-buttery, Meet-me-in-the-entry, Monkey's face, *Natt och dag* (Swedish), None-so-pretty, Pansy, *Pensée* (French), *Pensée sauvage* (French), Pink-eyed-John, Pink-of-my-Joan, Pink o' my John, Pink-o'-the-eye, Pretty faces, Pussy face, *Shasagh-na-criodh* (Irish Gaelic), Stepmother, Stepmother flower, *Stiefmütterchen* (German), *Styvmorsviol* (Swedish), Thinking flower, Three-color violet, Three faces in a hood, Three-faces-under-a-hood, Tickle-my-fancy, Tittle-my-fancy, *Trefaldighetsblomster* (Swedish), Tricolor pansy, *Trilliw* (Welsh), Trinity violet, *Vanlig styvmorsviol* (Swedish), *Violka trojbarevná* (Czech), *Wildes Stiefmütterchen* (German), and *Y Fioled-Fraith* (Welsh); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'happy memories which ease the heartbreak of separation', remembrance, souvenirs (yellow form), loving thoughts (white form), and 'you occupy my thoughts'.

The scentless flowers will droop at night or in wet weather.

Warning – prolonged use internally or large doses can cause an allergic skin reaction. The root taken internally can cause vomiting.

Wild pansy has a similar appearance to pansy (*Viola x wittrockiana*) that has larger flowers.

Tricolor is made up of Latin *tri-* (three) and *-color* (colour) components meaning 'three-coloured'.

According to legend wild pansy was originally white but it changed its colour after Cupid shot an arrow into it.

Wild pansy is surrounded by superstition and custom and was an ingredient of many love charms. An old rhyme describes your fortune by the number of lines on a pansy petal that has been picked or given to you. Picking the flower on a fine day would presage rain and if it was covered in dew it would cause the death of a loved one. If while someone slept its juice was placed on the eyelids the sleeper would fall in love with the person they first saw upon awakening – shades of part of the plot in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The flower was referred to as Pretty pawnee by the English Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser (c.1552-1599) in his first major work *The Shepheardes Calender*. As already indicated it features in several of the plays of his famous peer, William Shakespeare (1564-1616). In *Hamlet* he calls the flowers Pansies when Ophelia insincerely offers Laertes a bouquet just after the crowd has urged him to take the crown of Denmark.

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love,
remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

But in *The Taming of the Shrew* he calls them Love in idleness (as he does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

.....till I found it to be true,
I never thought it possible, or likely;
But see! while idly I stood looking on,
I found the effect of love in idleness;

The flower also provided a subject for the English poet, Mary Howitt (1814-1888) who was brought up by the Quakers and is said to have been much influenced by their way of life.

Heart's ease! one could look for half a day
Upon this flower, and shape in fancy out
Full twenty different tales of love and sorrow,
That gave this gentle name.

In the past on the European mainland wild pansy has provided an alternative to litmus paper to test for an acid or an alkali.

Records show that the North American Cherokee Indians came to know wild pansy and before planting they soaked their corn (*Zea*) in a root infusion of it to repel insects. They also valued medicinal qualities in the plant and used it to treat colds, coughs, headaches, catarrh, blood disorders and dysentery – and took an infusion as a Spring tonic.

The medicinal qualities of wild pansy were mentioned by the Greek physicians, Hippocrates (c.460-377 or 359 BC) who is celebrated as the 'father of medicine' and the 1st Century Pedanius Dioscorides. The plant was also familiar to the Arab medical fraternity.

In heraldry wild pansy (otherwise known as Heartsease) features not least as a play on words in the device of the National Heart Hospital in England.

Medicinally, herbalists once used the plant to cure epilepsy, convulsions in children, pleurisy, asthma, venereal diseases and heart complaints. It was recognized formally as a medicinal plant in Germany until 1926 and still is in some eastern European countries. Today herbalists can recommend the plant for use (under direction) for the treatment of rheumatism, skin eruptions, bronchitis and eczema. It is also used in homoeopathic treatments.

It is the birthday flower for 4th February.