

Daisy *Bellis perennis*

What's in a name?

The word daisy comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'Daeges Eage' which means "day's eye". This name was born out of the fact that the flower head opens and closes with the sunrise and sunset. The Latin name *Bellis perennis* came to symbolize innocence and childhood.

There are numerous different nicknames which include bruisewort (see folk medicine), priest's collar, bachelor's buttons and bull's-eye daisy.

Botany & Ecology

Bellis perennis is a perennial and a member of the Asteraceae family. If left uncut, the smooth leafless stems will grow up to 4" in length. The flower head has three or four rings of spoon shaped petals which often turn pink at the ends as they get older. Each ring has 15 to 30 petals. The leaves are evergreen and form a tight rosette close to the ground which spreads.



With milder winters becoming the norm, the daisy can be seen in flower from February through to early December. It is most obvious between May and early September.

The daisy is seen to be a useful addition to wildflower meadows as it is a good source of food for many types of small hoverfly and other pollinators. However, like the buttercup, it can become over dominant and without careful management it can swamp other wildflower species in the meadow.

Folklore

There is so much folklore connected with this tiny plant. One of the most well known being children's games, one of which originated in France and was a way of finding out if a boyfriend loves his girlfriend and how soon they would be married. The words "he loves me, he loves me not" were repeated while plucking out a single petal at a time. Having picked another flower, the girl would pull the petals whilst repeating the words "this year, next year or maybe never".

Once the petals were plucked, the small yellow button was rolled between two hands to break it up. The pieces were then tossed in the air and caught as they fell. The number of pieces caught was believed to foretell the number of children the girl would bear.

Lastly, making a daisy chain meant many things to different cultures. The Irish believed it was necessary to put a daisy chain around a new born baby to ensure it would not be stolen by the evil fairies. In some agricultural areas, it was common practice to hang a daisy chain on the door of a building to protect it from summer lightning.

Folk Medicine

The daisy was used in a variety of ways over the last 400 years. During the 16th century, herbalists recommended ingesting a drink made from daisies as a cure for catarrh, heavy menstrual bleeding and migraines. Similarly, an ointment was prescribed to alleviate bruises and swellings.

It was also used as a spring tonic to cleanse the blood, liver and kidneys. This could also be used to cure fevers, coughs and pleurisy. Henry VIII was said to eat large quantities of daisies to relieve stomach ulcers.

More recent research has shown that a wide range of pharmacological components exist within the plant which are currently being produced synthetically by the drugs industry. These include anti inflammatories, antimicrobial agents, cardioprotective and antidiabetic inhibitors.



*Please note, readers should take advice from a qualified doctor or herbalist before using plants as a cure for ailments.