

### What's in a name?

There are over 70 local names which includes 'eggs and bacon', butter and eggs', 'granny's toenails' and 'lady's slipper'. Some refer to the shape of the flower while others are related to its colour. Lady's slipper refers to the shape which mirrors that of a medieval slipper or sabot.

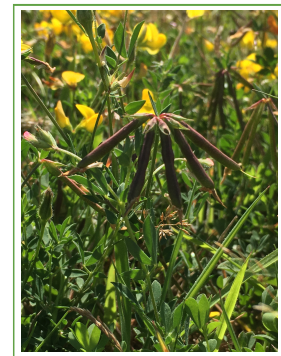
The flowers are an egg yolk orange and yellow which is reflected in the first two nicknames. 'Granny's toenails' is slightly derogatory and is associated with the hooked, claw like shape of the seed pods; hence 'bird's-foot'. Trefoil refers to the groups of three leaves which grow randomly from the stem.



### Botany & Ecology

This plant is a member of the pea family and subsequently it will fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil. It can be found abundant on grassland, heaths and dunes throughout much of the UK. The height varies between 5cm and 20 cm and occasionally more where supported by other plants. The ground level horizontal creeping stems can reach up to 50cm long. It can survive close grazing, trampling, and mowing.

It flowers between May and September and it is an important nectar source for many insects including bees and is also used as a larval food plant for some species of Lepidoptera such as the Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*, a day flying moth) and the Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*). It is also the host plant for the caterpillar of both the Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) and the Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*) butterflies.



### Folklore

In pagan times the plant was believed to have magical powers of protection and was woven into head wreaths along with other flowers. These were worn during midsummer festivities. This went on after Christianity was embraced because the leaf trefoil became associated with the Holy Trinity. This was an activity particularly common in Scotland.

In Eire, the plant was nicknamed 'no blame' as the children would gather pieces of it in the belief that it would make them immune to punishment.

### Folk Medicine

All parts of the plant contain cyanide and would be deadly if ingested in any great quantity. However, the seed pods and the flowers were used in small quantities mainly as a sedative and for other aspects of the nervous and cardiac systems. They have an antispasmodic effect on the digestive tract and the Italians diluted infusions and drank it to calm anxiety, insomnia and exhaustion.

An infusion was also used as an eye wash in the nineteenth century by the French physician Leclerc, a practice also used in the Outer Hebrides at the same time. Lastly, a similar infusion was used to reduce bleeding from severe cuts and wounds. This was common in agricultural Somerset where it was applied to livestock up until the 1960s.

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