

What's in a name?

Linaria, the genus name, comes from the Latin noun *Linus*, meaning flax or linen. *Vulgaris* means common. There are over twenty common or folk names which include butter and eggs and bread and butter and are associated with the colour of the flowers.

The name which we use most frequently is associated with the shape of the flower as it was felt that the flowers resembled the face of a toad. Secondly, whilst the leaves resemble that of the flax plant, they cannot be used to make any fabric. Subsequently, it was regarded as useless and only fit for toads.

Botany & Ecology

Looking very much like a snapdragon, this upright plant grows to between 15 and 90cm in height and spreads to a similar width. Its narrow strap-like leaves are bluish green and hairless, while the yellow flowers, 25 to 33mm long, have orange lower lips that become deeper orange as they age. It starts flowering in late July and will continue through until October or even November. Common Toadflax can be found on disturbed wasteland and the edges of paths through dry grassland. It can also be seen amongst hedgerows and on well drained grassy banks.

Because the flower is largely closed by its underlip, it does need strong insects to get in to pollinate it. It is a food plant for a large number of insects which include bumble bees and honeybees, the sweet gale moth (*Acronicta euphorbiae*), mouse moth (*Amphipyra tragopoginis*), silver Y (*Autographa gamma*), *Calophasia lunula*, gorgone checkerspot (*Charidryas gorgone carlota*) and toadflax pug (*Eupithecia linariata*).

Folklore

The earliest folklore in Celtic lands regarding the flower stressed its origin as a "Fae Flower", or plant of the fairies. Its presence was believed to indicate hidden treasure, but the seeker of secreted wealth should always beware the wrath of the Little People.

Folk Medicine

Linaria vulgaris has a long history of use in herbal remedies for a wide variety of ailments including jaundice, dropsy and enteritis. A laxative tea used to be made from the leaves. The leaves were also used to make ointments for various skin diseases and for treating piles. Other recorded uses include the production of insecticides, which may seem rather odd because bees and other nectar-hunting insects seem to love the flowers.

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