

What's in a name?

Once picked, the plant last for a very long time and the name is derived from the Greek word for immortality which is athenatus.

Botany & Ecology

Whilst not a native to the UK it was probably brought here from Europe as a herb for flavouring things like omelettes. Chefs originally used it as an alternative to the more expensive spices like nutmeg.

Tansy is a member of the Daisy family and flowers between June and September. The height of the plant varies between 12" and 42" (30cm-107cm), with robust angular stems which turn a redish colour nearer the top. The flower heads form a cluster at the top of the stem and each little flower or 'button' does not have petals.

The smell of the plant is particularly pungent when crushed and the natural oils are bitter which deters other insects from eating it. However, the Tansy Beetle (*Chrysolina graminis*), has developed an immunity to this and uses it as a host plant for both larvae and adults.

One of the best places to see the Tansy within the Borough is in Seafield Park at the southern end of the countryside conservation area.



Folklore

Between the 15th and 17th centuries many agricultural communities believed that popping a tansy leaf into your shoe would ensure a safe journey. It was also used in the same way in the belief that it would ward off a fever.

The Ancient Greeks believed that wrapping their dead in Tansy leaves would preserve the corpse until it was time for burial. The strong smell immitted by the crushed leaves was a good insect repellent. It was also placed in grain stores as millers believed the smell would repel mice but this was not always successful.

Folk Medicine

The plant is toxic and the oils had to be diluted before ingesting. It was long used as a cure for worms both in humans and livestock; a practise which extended into the early 20th century. In folk medicine, it became known as a 'woman's herb' and was prescribed to ease period pain. In the 17th Century, practitioners prescribed it for preventing miscarriages. Furthermore, a concentrated infusion was washed into the scalp to irradiate head lice whilst in the Outer Hebrides, a week dilution was prescribed to ease insomnia.

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