

## Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*

### What's in a name?

The genus name is derived from the ancient Greek word for 'thirst of water' and it refers to the cup-like look. The pair of large bright green leaves at the base of the stem form a collection point for rain water, giving the plant the names of 'Venus's bath' and 'our lady's bath'.

The name Teasel is primarily associated with its use during the nineteenth century within textile mills, where the dried heads were used to comb or tease wool before spinning.

The plant was grown extensively in parts of Lancashire to supply the textiles industry. It is still grown commercially on the Somerset Levels where the heads are collected and sold to independent traditional textiles producers. The heads are also seen and used as the best comb for snooker tables.



### Botany & Ecology

It takes two years to complete its life cycle. The first-year is spent as a basal rosette while the second-year sees the development of the tall woody stem and the flower heads.

Research has identified that the pool of water at the stem provides two functions. The first is to prevent sap-sucking insects such as aphids climbing the stem. Second, trapping insects which eventually rot. Their nutrients are absorbed into the plant via the tissues in the leaves.

### Folklore

The water which collects in the basal rosette and the cups along the stem was long believed to have rejuvenating spiritual powers and was considered to be magical. The Irish believed it to be the wine of the fairies and it was forbidden to drink it.

### Folk Medicine

The water collected in the cups was, and still is, used to sooth sore eyes, particularly for those who suffer from hay fever.

This water was also used to improve the complexion and applied to warts in an effort to reduce their size or encourage them to drop off.

In the 17th century, some doctors prescribed the use of an ointment made from teasel roots to help cure ulcers.

Finally, the roots were crushed and boiled to make a tea which was then ingested to cure jaundice.



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