

Biblical Plant Names



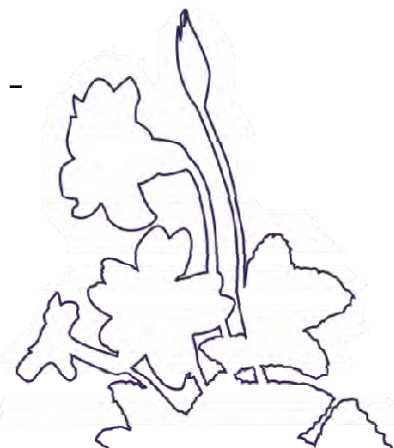
There is a long tradition of naming plants, both common names and scientific names, for their connection with the Bible and Christian saints. There is a particularly widespread tradition around the world of Mary flowers, which was lost or forgotten after the Reformation in Britain, but is still retained in some of the Gaelic, Irish and Welsh names of plants.

There are many common plant names based on the Bible, its characters or Christian saints, including Aaron's Rod, Jacob's Ladder, St John's wort. However the most widespread tradition of all is the naming of plants for their connections with the Virgin Mary, the Mary plants. These often have 'Lady' or 'Our Lady' or 'Virgin' or 'Mary' as part of their name, although some claim that not all of these plants were named for Mary. Some authorities see this as an extension of an even older tradition of naming plants for female deities including Venus and Freya. The website for the Mary Garden project is given below.

References & Onlines Resources:

Sue Eland, Plant Lives Website (<http://www.plantlives.com/>)
 Cameron, J, 1883, The Gaelic Names of Plants
 Mac Coitir N. & Langrishe G., 2006, Irish Wild Plants - Myths, Legends and Folklore

Mac Coitir N. & Langrishe G. 2003, Irish Trees - Myths, Legends and Folklore
 Mabey, R, 1998, Flora Britannica
 Mary Gardens http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/m_garden/marygardensmain.html





A selection of some of the plants named for their connection with the Bible or saints

Aaron's Rod (Adam & Eve's Flannel, Virgin Mary's Candle— Greater Mullein) (*Verbascum Thapsus*) - This plant has a long tradition of magical qualities in many countries - its stems were also used to make candles, and sometimes used in funeral processions.

Angelica (Angel's Food, Holy Ghost Plant, Holy Plant) - (*Angelica archangelica*) - Used for its medicinal and health-giving properties for many centuries, it is associated with both the Archangel Michael and the Archangel Raphael

Archangel (white) (Adam & Eve in the Bower (Dead nettle) (*Lamium album*) - Comes into flower in March, around the time of St Michael's Day, and is associated with the Archangel Michael

Archangel (yellow) (*Lamium album*) - see above

Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*) - Dedicated to St Hilary (January 13th)

Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) - Associated with St George and St George's Day

Cowslip (*Primula veris*) - Also known as St Peter's Keys, St Peter's Herb, Our Lady's Keys

Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile* or *Anthemis species*) - Dedicated to Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary

Christ's Spear (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) - One of this plant's names, it is usually called Hound's Tongue

Crocus (*Crocus species*) - Associated with Saint Valentine

Dead Nettle (*Lamium album*) - Associated with Saint Vincent

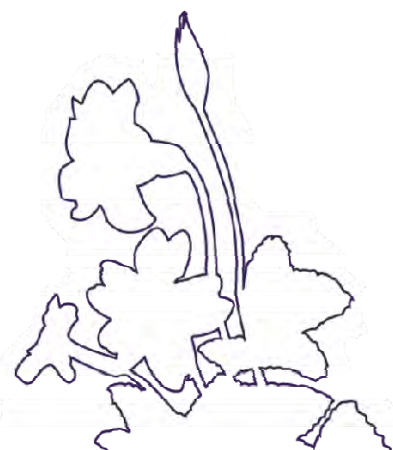
Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) - Associated with St Moluag, Irish Missionary in Scotland, contemporary with St Columba

Hellebore (*Helleborus species*) - Dedicated to Saint Agnes but also associated with the conversion of Saint Paul

Holy Grass

(*Hierochloa odorata*) - One of the strewing herbs for the floors of churches, others include rushes, sweet flag, mugwort and meadowsweet

Jacobs Ladder (Jacob's Walking Stick; Joseph's Walking Stick; Ladder to Heaven) (*Polemonium caeruleum*) - A rare plant of the chalkland areas of Derbyshire, its leaves are supposed to resemble a ladder



Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) - Dedicated to Saint Lucian, January 8th

Lent Lily (Daffodil) (*wild daffodil is Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) - The plant flowers around the Lent and Easter periods.

Marigold (*Calendula officinale*) - Associated with the 25th of March, Annunciation Day of the Virgin Mary

Michaelmas Daisy (*Aster species*) - Introduced but several species naturalised. Flowers around Michaelmas (29th September)

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) - Sometimes known as St John's Herb and St John's Plant— Has a long tradition of healing and protective powers, it is carved in the architecture of Exeter Cathedral. A girdle made from the plant was supposed to have helped John the Baptist

Osmund Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) - Also known as Herb Christopher and Saint Olaf's Beard

Pignut (*Conopodium majus*) - Sometimes called Saint Anthony's Nut

Ragwort (*Senecio jacobea*) - Sometimes called St James Wort

Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) - Named after the Biblical King, its root is said to resemble a seal

Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum angustifolium*) - either native or naturalised, it also grows in the Levant

St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) - A very important plant in Britain for medicine and protection. Often collected on St John's Day and Eve (23/24 June)

Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolour*) - Sometimes called Herb Trinity

Winter Cress (*Barbarea vulgaris*) - Associated with Saint Barbara, 4th December

Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) - Also known as Candlemass Caps, Star of Bethlehem; It is one of the first spring flowers and had many cultural associations in ancient Greece & Rome

Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*) - Linked to Saint Benedict who was saved from poison, because of its use as an antidote to poison

Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) - Called 'Aleluja' in several languages including Welsh



Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) - Dedicated to Saint Peter

A small selection of Irish, Scottish and Welsh Names for wild plants

Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) - Barigin or Bairghin (Irish) (a pilgrim's habit)

Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) - Cuig mhear Mhuire (Mary's five fingers)

Dwarf Elder (*Sambucus ebulus*) - Ysgawen Mair (Mary's Elder) Welsh

Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) - Gruag Mhuire (Mary's Locks)

Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*) - Lus Mairi (Irish) Marywort, Marygold

Milk Thistle (*Carduus marianus*) - Fothannan beanuichte (Gaelic - blessed thistle); Fothannan beanduichte - Irish - blessed thistle; The tradition is that the leaves were stained by the Virgin Mary's milk

Nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*) - Duilleach mhaith (Gaelic - good leaf); Duilleog bhrighid (Irish - either efficacious leaf or St Bridget's Leaf)

Our Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla species*) - Falluing Mhuire (Mary's Mantel - Gaelic); Dhearna Mhuire (Mary's Palm - Irish)

Redshank (*Polygonum persicaria*) - Am boinne-foila (the blood-spot); Lus chrann ceusaidh (Herb of the tree of crucifixion) - The tradition is that the plant grew at the foot of the cross and drops of blood fell on its leaves and marked them

St Daboec's Heath (*Daboecia cantabrica*) - Named after an Irish saint, Dabheog, from County Donegal

St Johns' Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) - Allas Mhuire (Mary's Image); Coad aslachan Cholum chille (Saint Columba's flower) - Saint Columba revered it and carried it in his arms because it was dedicated to his favourite evangelist St John

Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*) - Seamhair Mhuire (Sweet Grass of Mary) Gaelic & Irish



A small selection of some of the plants associated with the Virgin Mary

Columbine (*Aquilegia species*) - Our Lady's Shoe; Often appears in Biblical paintings, it is also associated with Christ because its flowers are shaped like doves.

Forget-me-not (*Myosotis species*) - Also known as Mary's Eyes in many parts of Europe

Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) - Gloves of Mary, Gloves of Our Lady, Virgin's Gloves, Virgin's Fingers

Greater Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) - Our Lady's Candles, Virgin Mary's Candles

Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) - Some traditions state that Mary & Jesus hid in juniper bushes in their flight out of Egypt

Lady's Mantle (*Achemilla species*) - Our Lady's Mantle

Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*) - Our Lady's Slipper

Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) - Said to have grown from the tears of Mary at the foot of the cross

Roses & Lilies (*Rosa species and Lilium species*) - These plants are very often associated with the Virgin Mary in both their names and art

Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) - Often associated with the Virgin Mary

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