



MARIGOLD

Latin: *Calendula officinalis*

Welsh: Melyn Mair

A well-known garden plant, the cheerful Marigold has medicinal and culinary values. It can also be used as a dye and for cosmetic purposes. The Marigold was introduced into Britain by the Romans, having long been used in Greek and Arabic cultures.

The Latin name *Calendula* derives from Kalends, the first day of each month in the Roman calendar, and by extension was taken to mean 'throughout the months', a reference to the long flowering period of the plant.

(Nicholas Culpeper, in his Herbal published in 1653 says:

'They flower all summer long and sometimes in winter if it be mild'.)

The Greeks garnished and flavoured their food with the golden petals.

The Romans used Marigolds to bring down fevers and to cure warts.

In medieval times Marigolds were used to remedy intestinal problems, liver complaints, and snake and insect bites. The flowers were also considered as emblems of love.

Like many flowers, Marigolds open at daybreak and close when the sun goes down.

They were Shakespeare's 'Mary-buds':

'And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes' (Cymbeline II iii. 1609)

The Physicians of Myddfai recommended a concoction of Marigold, good wine, vinegar, strong mead or strong ale for the treatment of typhus and as a preventative against 'the foreign pestilence called the plague'.

Medicinal Values and Usages

The plant has antiseptic, anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. Marigold leaves were used to treat wounds on battle fields during the American Civil War (a recognition of their styptic properties). The Shakers, founded in America as an offshoot of the Quakers in 1747, used Marigold leaves to treat gangrene. Sap from the stems is still reputed to remove warts, corns and callouses. The Marigold is still found to be useful in the treatment of:

- burns, scalds and stings (as a compress)
- conjunctivitis (as an eyewash)
- varicose veins and chilblains.

An infusion of petals, drunk as a tea, was said to relieve sleeplessness and nervous tension.

Culinary Uses

The poor man's saffron, Marigold petals were used to colour butter and cheese. Marigold petals can be added to salads and omelettes. Young leaves can be added to salads.

Cosmetic Uses

Marigold is used in many cosmetic preparations to nourish and cleanse the skin. An infusion of the flowers produces a lotion to clear up spots and pimples. It can also be used as a hair rinse.

Dyeing

Boiled petals produce a yellow dye.

