



## NASTURTIIUM

Latin: *Tropaeolum majus*

Welsh; Meri a Mari

Nasturtium is indigenous to South America.

Seeds of *Tropaeolum minus*, a semi-trailing type of Nasturtium, were brought to Europe from Peru via Spain in the 1530s and were acquired by John Gerard in London in the 1590s. Gerard was probably the first person in England to get seeds of 'this rare and fine plant' and grew it in his Holborn garden.

At the time of its introduction the herb was known as *Nasturcium indicum* or *Nasturcium peruvianum*.

The climbing Nasturtium (*T. majus*) also came from Peru, arriving in this country in the late C17th.

Nasturtium was valued in Elizabethan England for its beauty and for its efficacy in treating scurvy (the leaves and flowers of the plant are rich in Vitamin C).

*Tropaeolum* is the name coined by Linnaeus from the Latin word for a trophy.

The leaf shape was seen to resemble that of a shield; the flowers were likened to the golden helmet on the Roman goddess Victory.

On the Continent, the flower shape was associated with the hooded robes of the Capuchin monks.

Gardeners in the C18th trained Nasturtiums up pyramids of poles, thereby accentuating the perceived shapes of leaves and flowers.

The peppery taste of the leaves gave rise to the plant's more common Latin name, Nasturtium, which translates as 'twisted nose'.

The constituents of Nasturtium are similar to those found in watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*).

Seeds, flowers and leaves are all edible. Leaves were (and are) eaten in salads. Unripe seeds and flower heads were pickled as substitutes for caper.