



SNOWDROP

Latin: *Galanthus nivalis*

Welsh: Eirlys

The Latin name *galanthus* derives from the Greek *gala anthos* meaning milk flower, a reflection of the snow-white appearance of the flower.

The Snowdrop is one of the first flowers (often the very first) to appear at the beginning of the year.

It is greeted with universal joy as a harbinger of spring, but the superstition still survives that to pick the flowers and bring them indoors is to invite death into the family.

One Christian legend attaching to the Snowdrop says that an angel helping Eve after her Fall from Paradise caught and breathed life into a snowflake which fell to earth as a Snowdrop.

Numerous species of the Snowdrop are native to a wide area stretching from the Pyrenees to the Ukraine. When introduced into Britain from the Mediterranean in the C16th, the earliest name given to the flower was Bulbous Violet.

The first species to be grown in British gardens was given the name *nivalis* (growing near snow).

Snowdrops are rarely mentioned in Herbals. John Gerard (1545-1612) in his Herball published in 1597 does refer to them but only by their Latin name. In a later edition of this Herball published in 1633 it is stated that 'some call them also Snowdrops'.

The only medicinal usage ascribed to the Snowdrop in past centuries was the application of a poultice of crushed bulbs to alleviate frostbite.

Recent research has discovered the value of galanthamine, an active substance found in snowdrops, daffodils and other narcissi to be of value in the treatment of memory loss and Alzheimers disease, and crops of these plants are now grown commercially for medical research and usage.