



BOX

Latin: *Buxus sempervirens*

Welsh: Pren Bocs

The name Box derives from the Latin *buxus* (box tree or flute) which in turn derived from the Greek *puxus* (little box);

Box is a native plant throughout Europe, North Africa and Turkey.

Box was used extensively to provide clipped edges in formal Roman gardens, notably in Italy,

Sprigs of Box have been discovered in excavated Roman coffins in Britain and elsewhere indicating that the plant had funerary and possible ritual significance.

The custom of throwing sprigs of Box into graves endured in the north of England into the C19th.

Superstition long endured that it was unlucky to bring Box into the house.

John Gerard in his Herball (publ.1597) lists *Buxus sempervirens Suffruticosa*, the neater 'Edging Box'. This variety is thought to have originated in Holland and to have been introduced into England some years after Gerard was writing.

It is the *Suffruticosa* Box which is the favoured ornamental edging plant and the one used to edge the medicinal beds in the Cowbridge Physic Garden.

When dampened by rain, the leaves give off a strong musky odour. This smell was hated by Queen Anne who caused all the Box bushes which had been planted to edge the parterres in St James' Park for her predecessors William and Mary to be removed. Box was once used for medicinal purposes (as a narcotic and as a sedative), but all parts of the plant are poisonous.

The value of Box wood has long been appreciated for its great strength and beauty. Both stem wood and root are dense and closely grained and have been used by wood carvers, turners and engravers to produce items as diverse as flutes, pegs for stringed instruments, chessmen, sacred statues, rolling pins and combs. Cross-cut stem wood was used for wood engravings from which prints could be made.

A perfume was once made from the bark (it must have had a very distinctive odour!), and Box leaves mixed with sawdust were used to dye hair auburn.

Box leaves were once used as a substitute for Hops