



COWSLIP

Latin: *Primula veris*

Welsh: Briallu Mair

The Cowslip is native to north and central Europe.

Its Latin name probably derives from *primo vere* (in the beginning of spring). Its common name has a more agricultural association with cattle grazing the meadows and depositing 'cowslops' (from the Old English *cu-sloppe*).

There are several legends attaching to the Cowslip. One states that the flowers bloomed where St. Peter dropped his keys to heaven, and among country names for the plant are Keys of Heaven and St. Peter's Keys.

From Roman times Cowslips have been used medicinally, particularly for treating nervous afflictions.

In the Middle Ages they were recommended for treating the palsy, possibly because the flowers nod and tremble in the breeze and could thus be incorporated into the Doctrine of Signatures. Old herbalists gave the plant the name *Herba paralysis*.

Nicholas Culpeper (1616-64) recommended Cowslips for treating 'false apparitions'.

When Cowslips grew in fragrant profusion in the countryside the flowers were gathered for making wines, syrups and cordials. But changing agricultural practices, particularly in the last century, have led to its rapid disappearance in the wild.

The Cowslip is promiscuous and will cross breed with its close relation the Primrose to produce the False Oxlip.

Primrose (Latin: *Primula vulgaris*; Welsh: Briallu Blodiog)

Another herald of spring, the Primrose (*prima rosa*) was included in medieval potions to treat gout and rheumatism, and in ointments for minor wounds and skin blemishes.

The flowers, with their subtle fragrance, were an essential ingredient of love potions.

As with the Cowslip, the flowers of Primroses were gathered as a base for home-made wines and cordials.