



“Common Toadflax” (*Linaria vulgaris*)

The flower of this lovely plant closely resembles the familiar snapdragon, a favorite of children all over. It is quite common throughout Wales, where its yellow flowers are often spotted along hedgerows. In Scotland it is known as “Doggies” and is usually to be found in open spaces.

Long ago, an infusion of this plant was commonly used as a laxative. An ointment was also made that was a popular compress for burns. Some say that you can cook and eat the shoots, but rave reviews of this recipe are few and far between, so I wouldn't recommend it.

Today, here in Flagstaff, you can easily find a relative of this plant, the “Dalmatian Toadflax”, which is one of our most tenacious invasive plants. While toadflax fills an important ecological niche in many Celtic regions, here it aggressively takes over large areas, pushing out our native plants. Just one Dalmatian Toadflax plant can produce over 500,000 seeds in one growing season!



“Forget-Me-Not” (*Myosotis sylvatica*)

The earliest folklore in Celtic lands regarding this attractive flower stressed its origin as a “Fae Flower”, or plant of the fairies. Its presence was believed to indicate hidden treasure, but the seeker of secreted wealth should always beware the wrath of the Little People.

The roots of this plant are quite extensive, and as gardeners who have tried to remove it soon find out, one of the Forget-Me-Not's prime virtues is its tenacity. Perhaps this is how it came to signify “undying love and devotion”.

Many ancient herbalists used a syrup made from this plant to treat a variety of pulmonary ailments. There are also some legends associated with it that say by mixing the juice of this flower with other ingredients you can make a potion that helps harden your sword and spear.



“Foxglove” (*Digitalis purpurea*)

The original name of this flower was “Little People’s Glove”, and many Celtic legends tell how the fairies used the florets of the plant as gloves or wee bonnets. Since this flower was believed to belong to the fairies, it was considered unlucky at best to bring it into your home. However, planting some near your garden would please the Little People, who would make use of the flowers when you were not looking.

The juice of the plant has long been considered a poison, but in Irish mythology the juice of ten leaves could be made into a potion that would cure children who had been “fairy struck”.

In addition, many Celtic tales mention that Foxglove was a key ingredient in witches’ flying potions.



“Honeysuckle” (*Lonicera periclymenum*)

Ah! The amazing scent of this wonderful flower cannot help but bring a smile to your face. Perhaps that is why so many different Celtic people viewed this flower as an aphrodisiac. Alas, in latter years young women were warned never to bring it into their homes, lest it encourage erotic dreams. Aside from its lovely aroma, Honeysuckle (or “Woodbine” in many Celtic regions) was used by “wise women” as a cure for a variety of ailments. Interestingly, the leaves and flowers of this plant are rich in salicylic acid – a key ingredient in aspirin. Woodbine also contains natural antibiotics, making it a popular folk remedy for a variety of physical complaints. Some Celts believed that Woodbine would protect dairy products from spoilage, and therefore braided it into hoops and placed them around their milk containers.

Woodbine also has a high sugar content, leading many people to make a very fragrant wine from the plant. Woodbine wine is often mentioned as a preferred drink of some witches during sabbat celebrations.



“Lupin” (*Lupinus albus*)

This plant is part of a wide-spread family found throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. Here in Flagstaff we can often see its cousin’s beautiful purple flowers while out hiking.

The White Lupin, which is quite common in Cornwall as well other Celtic lands, has long been used as a medicine (as well as admired for its beauty). Many early books, putting Celtic folk medicine down on paper for the first time, mentioned that adding ground cumin to a mixture of wine and lupin, made an excellent lice remedy. At least your head would smell good.

Lupin was also added to a variety of other ingredients to make a flea repellent, and in some areas was fairly popular as a compress to relieve minor aches and pains.



“Red Poppy” (*Papaver rhoeas*)

“We shall not sleep though poppies grow in Flander’s Field”. So wrote John McCrae after the First World War, securing the poppy’s image as a memorial for loved ones lost in battle. But the poppy was already well entrenched in many legends as a symbol of Eternal Sleep. Many ancient tales explain this flower’s vibrant red color as the result of terrible strife and suffering. However, a closer look shows that the Red Poppy is actually a veritable floral toolbox!

The foliage can be cooked and eaten, and many Celtic people used the seeds in cakes and breads. (This is still quite common in Brittany and other Celtic lands.) In some areas folk still extract a high quality oil from the seeds, which is often used as a substitute for olive oil.

The beautiful red petals are not very effective as a dye, but they have long been used to add a richer hue to old ink and to color syrups.



“Rosemary” (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

This small evergreen is most commonly found in fairly rocky terrain, especially near the sea. It has long been valued (for very good reason) as a highly prized culinary herb by many different cultures. Rosemary can be found growing wild in all eight of the Celtic regions, especially Cornwall and Galicia.

In addition to its well-known uses in cooking, rosemary has long been used as a “pick me up” tonic, combating depression, fatigue and headache. Many herbalists today use this plant to combat a variety of nervous disorders, citing its antispasmodic properties. It may be that many Celtic “wise women” used it in a similar manner. The International Society for Horticultural Science is currently studying the traditional uses of rosemary in Galician folk medicine.

Other uses of rosemary have included a yellow-green dye, created from both the leaves and flowers, and as a natural insect repellent.



“Thrift” (*Armeria maritime*)

Also known as “Sea Pink”, this is one of the earliest, and most popular, spring flowers in Wales. It is usually seen along the cliffs near the ocean where its gorgeous pink flowers wave in the salty breeze.

Thrift is a tough and tenacious plant, whose stems are often used in basketry. Rather than drying them out as with other plants, traditional Celtic artisans used the thrift stems fresh when weaving.

There is also an interesting malady known in the Scottish islands called Barr A' Chinn (“through the head”). It is believed that if a young child suffers a shock, they may fall into a deep melancholy from which it is hard to revive them. A traditional cure known on Tiree calls for a special concoction made from the thrift plant.