

California Poppy

Botanical Name: *Eschscholzia*

Family: *Papaveraceae*



“*Copa de ora*” is the name the Spanish explorers gave to this golden flower. Translated, the name means “cup of gold.” Because of the California poppy, explorers called California the “Golden West” long before gold was discovered in the state’s hills. This poppy is not related to the opiate poppies of foreign lands and so brings only joy to those lucky enough to see it bloom.

The California poppy was taken to Russia by a French botanist, Adelbert Chamisso, on a voyage led by Otto von Kotzebue who later circumnavigated the globe three times. Chamisso named the poppy after the Prussian ship’s doctor, Dr. Elsholz. The Russians changed the flower’s name to sound more Russian: Eschscholz or Eschscholtz. Western botanists call the poppy *Eschscholzia* or *Eschscholtzia*.

This trip around the world was organized in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. Chamisso was a French revolutionary refugee who had grown up in Berlin. During his travels, he kept a detailed journal of the three-year expedition that included the hardships and joys he experienced. His favorite times were the Sunday violin concerts given by the ship’s Bengali cook. The expedition reached the Bering Strait looking for the Northwest Passage and anchored in the ports of Chamisso and Kotzebue. They also explored the Pacific islands, one of which the captain named Eschscholtz Atoll. The island kept this name until 1946 when it became the Bakini Island.

California poppies look delicate; however, they are very hardy. This poppy does no harm and is the kind of gold that doesn’t create greed in men. Spreading the seeds now should produce lovely gold for any gardener the following growing season.



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