

Christmas Rose

Botanical Name: *Helleborus*

Family: Ranunculaceae

The rose grows at Christmastime and blooms last for weeks. This plant can last for years. The legend states that a child wept at the stable in Bethlehem because she had no gift for the baby. An angel landed and showed her the Christmas rose poking through the snow to use as her gift.

Because this plant is very poisonous, it is not one to give a newborn. Its Greek name is *helleboros*. Interestingly it was used from ancient times, with caution, as a medicine to cure children of worms. The Christmas rose was used in ancient Greece by Melampus to cure the daughters of Proetus, king of Tiryns. The women had not been polite to a Greek goddess, either Hera or Dionysus. As punishment, the girls were deprived of their senses and streaked naked through the Peloponnesus. Melampus, a shepherd, got them to stop long enough to drink milk from his goats, which had eaten hellebore; they were cured. Melampus received a nice portion of Proetus's kingdom for curing his daughters. One John Gerard said to use it with caution as it could kill the patient. It was also used to help "mad and furious men...and for all those that are troubled with blacke choler, and molested with melancholy."

The Christmas rose is a miraculous plant. Its seeds are spread by snails. They eat the oil covering the seed and carry the rest away in their slime. When the flowers are frozen solid and the ice melts, the petals are soft and fresh as spring blossoms. There is surely a scientific explanation for this, but some just marvel at it anyway.

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Seen from first flower to mature flower to the flower's decline.