

Iris

Common Names: Iris, flag, gladdon (ancient)

Family: Iridaceae

In Greek mythology, Iris was the rainbow that linked this world to others. “She escorted souls along her iridescent bridge to another life and she herself used it to join the thoughts of gods and men.” (Pg. 104)



The iris of our eye is the part of the eye that cannot be changed except to cover it with another color. Egyptians used the eye as a symbol in Karnak and they also decorate graves and the brows of Egyptian gods. White iris decorate the graves of the Muslim dead.

Having three petals, the iris became a religious symbol dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Since the leaves are sword-like older dictionaries call the iris (and the gladiolus) “xiphium” from the Greek *xiphos* (sword.) The leaves represented the pain of Mary when her son suffered and her sharp defense against the Devil.

The white flag iris is to have saved the Frankish king Clovis who then went on to conquer much of France under the Christian banner. When Clovis found white iris growing in the shallows of the Rhine river, he knew it would be shallow enough for his men to cross and thus escape the Goths. He then adopted the iris flower as his emblem and so it became the symbol of French kings. Irises were on Louis VII’s banner during the Second French Crusade in 1147. The banner was called *fleur de Louis* that became fleur-de-lis.

Irises have been grown in Japan, China, Siberia and almost the entire temperate world. Tropical



climates are the only places where they don't grow naturally. America has some native irises but many of our varieties were brought over from England. Thomas Jefferson was a fan of the iris and wrote to his daughter in 1811, "The flowers come forth like belles of the day, have their short reign of beauty and splendor and retire..." (Pg. 105)

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names
by Diana Wells