

Poppy

Common Names: Poppy, popple, (Old English)

Botanical Name: *Papaver*

Family Papaveraceae



Papaver, the Latin name may go back to *pap* that is a milky food that might have associations with the opium poppy's milky juice. The corn or field poppy may get its name from the Greek *rhoeas* from the Greek root *rho* meaning red, as the root may be red. Because corn poppies do well in freshly turned soil, this may explain why they were so prevalent in France during World I. From this time on the red poppy became the symbol for war.

From the earliest of times the petals of the corn poppy was known to have been used medicinally, but it is not comparable to the milky latex of the opium poppy. The opium poppy's name comes from the Latin *somnus* or sleep and *ferre* meaning to bring. When the narcotic opium poppy's seedpods dry, they have latex, which is then scraped off, from the slashed pods. It gets its name from the Greek *opion* or *opos* that means "vegetable juice."

The opium poppy seeds used in breads, cakes and dressings are not narcotic. These are the *Papaver somniferum*. It is quite legal to buy the white seeds of *Papaver somniferum* var. *hortense* in America and many nurseries sell them, but it is not really legal to grow poppies from them. Oriental poppies that are perennials are harmless as far as opium goes. Another garden poppy is apricot and coral colored Iceland poppy, or *Papaver nudicaule* from the Latin for "bare stemmed."



The Rev. William Wilks, vicar of Shirley, in Surrey bred Shirley poppies from field poppies. The Rev. saw one white-tipped corn poppy and marked the plant. He later sewed the seeds into his garden after removing all of the rest. Each year he selected all of the white edged poppies to save. In time he grew a wide variety of colors on a pure white petal base.

Poppies grow wherever they wish and cannot be moved.

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names
by Diana Wells