

Datura

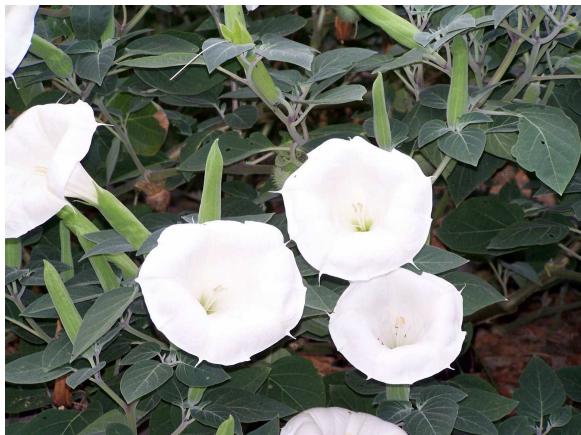
Common Names: Angel's trumpet, thorn apple

Family: Solanaceae

This plant with its most beautiful trumpet-like flowers has in its beauty the ability to kill. Deadly stories whirl about it from all over the world and from ages past. The Arabic name “*tator*,” or its Indian name, “*dhat*” are the derivatives of its name. “Indian thugs used the Datura to poison victims and it was used officially to execute criminals.” Linnaeus changed the name from the Indian name to the Latin root of *dare* (to give), because datura was given to those with weakened sexual powers.



Datura was used by witches who formed it into an ointment and would “soar above the world.” Native Americans used it as an anesthetic and a narcotic medicine. South Americans gave it to slaves and wives before being buried alive with their lord and masters.



Thomas Jefferson would not plant it or other poisonous plants because he had grandchildren and was concerned for their safety. Jefferson states that during the reign of terror after the French Revolution “every man of firmness carried it constantly in his pocket to anticipate the guillotine. It brings on the sleep of death as quietly as fatigue does the ordinary sleep.”

Scopolamine, a by-product of the datura, is used today as an aid for motion sickness whether in the air or on the seas.

Perhaps the lovely flowers are trumpeting warnings to all who own them.

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names
by Diana Wells