

Common Name: **Orris Root**

Genus: *Iris*

Species: *germanica* "Florentina"

Family: Iridaceae

AKA: *Iris florentina*, White Flower de Luce, Flower de Luce of Florence



Historical Uses:

Medical: "Dioscorides describes the Orris Root as having a warming faculty, fitting against coughs and convulsions. They were also described as being good for "bites of venomous beasts" and "sun burning". The root, when powdered, was soothing to the flesh and when mixed with rose water is good for sore eyes." (1)

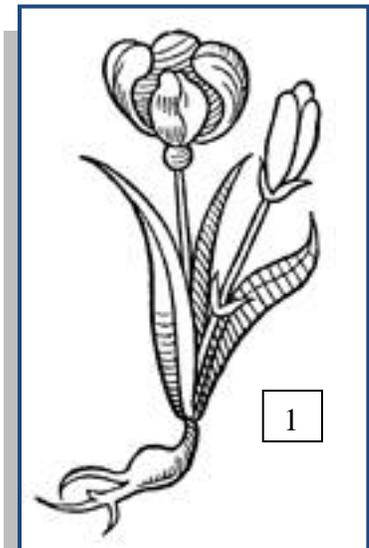
"The iuyce of these Floure de-luces doth not onely mightily and vehemently draw forth choler, but most especially waterie humors, and is singular good purgation for them that have the Dropsie, if it be drunke in sweet wort or whay. The same are good for them that have evill spleens, or that are troubled with cramps or convulsions, for such as are bit with Serpents. It profiteth also much those that have Gonorrhoea, or the running reines, being drunk with Vinegar, as Diosc. Saith; and drunk with Wine they bring downe the monethly termes." (2)

"For pain in the bladder and if a person cannot urinate, take the outer part of the roots of the plant that is called *gladiolus*, dry it, pound it, and mix with it two cups of wine and three cups of water. Give this to drink. For pain of the spleen, take the same plant when it is young, dry it and pound it into powder. Give this to drink in light wine. It is believed it will heal the spleen in a wonderful manner. For abdominal and chest pain, take the pounded berries of this plant and give them to drink in goat's milk or better in lukewarm wine. The soreness will go away." (3)

Culinary: No uses identified.

Ornamental: Attractive flowers.

Other: Petals of purple iris, when combined with alum, made a beautiful green pigment for painters. Roots, when dried produced a delicate perfume. Also included in potpourris and sachet powders (4).



Folklore/Astrology: “It is warm and dry at the end of the third degree, and is governed by the moon. Dedicated to Juno, it is a symbol of power and majesty, having formed the design of the scepter where its three uprights stand for faith, wisdom, and valor. It was named for Iris, goddess of the rainbow, because of its various colors. Called *gladiolus* by the Latins, it referred to the piercing sorrows of the Virgin Mary during Christ’s ordeals, and was thereafter an attribute of the Queen of Heaven and the Immaculate Conception.” (5)

“From ancient times the stately Iris stood as a symbol of power and majesty- it was dedicated to Juno and was the origin of the scepter, the Egyptians placing it on the brow of the Sphinx and on the scepter of their kings, the three leaves of its blossoms typifying faith, wisdom, and valour.” (6)



Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Rhizomes, oils

Medicinal: “A soothing, aromatic herb that has diuretic and expectorant effects. Both a purgative and anti-diarrheal.” Included in treatments for diarrhea, coughs and mucus. Used externally for treatment of deep wounds (7)



Close-up of flower. Note unopened flower buds L. & R.

Culinary Uses: Sometimes rhizomes used in N. African spice mixture. (8)

Other: Used in perfumery, potpourris, dusting powders, and breath fresheners. (9)

Cautions: “All parts are harmful if eaten. Skin irritant and allergen.” (10)

Area of Origin: Eastern Mediterranean

Physical description: Stout upright plant w/sword shaped fans

Plant type: Perennial

Form: Upright

Height: 24-48”

Flower color: White to white w/violet-purple tint.

Flowering period: Summer

Soil type: Well drained,

Soil requirements:

Ph: Neutral to alkaline

Fruit: Hardiness zone: USDA 5-7

Sun requirements: Full sun, morning preferred.

Propagation: By seed sown in autumn or spring. By division or offsets in summer.

Sources:

1. Freeman, p. 39
2. Gerard, p. 51-55
3. Van Ardsall, p.183-184
4. Freeman, p. 39
5. Anderson, p. 154
6. Grieve, p. 434-437
7. Bown, p. 244
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid

Illustrations:

1. Dover Publications
2. PSUMG 2014
3. PSUMG 2014