

ARNOLDIA



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THE NAME JASMINE

FEW plant names have become so widely used as jasmine: rose perhaps, and lily, with such extensions as primrose and calla-lily, and possibly a few others, but probably no other name which is predominantly tropical in its associations.

According to the authorities, it traces its origin from the Arabic and Persian "Yāsmīn" or "Yasaman", so we may assume that the plant first known by this name was probably the Arabian jasmine, or to give it its botanical name as well, *Jasminum Sambac*. Native to tropical Asia, it has been cultivated there for centuries, and must have been introduced to Persia long ago. The epithet *Sambac* is itself an ancient Indian name for the species.

The spelling most commonly met with is jasmine, but almost as common is jessamine, with gessamine and jasmin as variations, and, even, jessamy and jeshamy, not to mention those in other languages.

The genus *Jasminum*, to use the variant which is correct in botanical Latin, contains about 200 different species and is mostly tropical in distribution. However, a few species can stand a limited amount of frost. *J. officinale*, the poet's jasmine which, incidentally, in the matter of botanical nomenclature, is the type species for the genus, is perhaps the best known, with its profusion of sweetly fragrant white flowers in summer. Closely related is the tropical and subtropical *J. grandiflorum*, the Spanish or Catalanian jasmine, and one may speculate that its association with that part of the world is due to its having been introduced to cultivation in the West by the Moors. Be that as it may, it is cultivated commercially in the south of France, and elsewhere, for the production of oil of jasmine, the basis or constituent of so many perfumes, an extract from the freshly picked flowers. In India, oil of jasmine is also obtained from *J. multiflorum* and *J. Sambac*, while in southern China the flowers of this latter species are used for flavoring tea, the well known and fragrant jasmine tea. Today, *J. Sambac* is even grown on a small commercial scale in Hawaii, where the unopened flower buds are gathered for fragrant leis. The Hawaiian name is *pikake*, the peacock flower,

so named because of the fondness of Princess Kaiulani for both the flower and white peacocks.

But the name jasmine is not confined to plants of the botanical genus *Jasminum*. Perhaps the two other plants with this name which are best known are the Carolina-jasmine (in this case more usually written jessamine) *Gelsemium semper-virens*, and the Cape-jasmine or *Gardenia*. Carolina-jasmine is native to the southeastern U.S.A., and belongs to another botanical family, the *Loganiaceae*. It occurs in woods and thickets and is a twining, high-climbing, shrubby plant which produces deliciously fragrant yellow flowers in the spring. Nor is its association with the name jasmine confined to its common name, for the Latin generic name *Gelsemium* is itself derived from the Italian name for the true jasmine, *gelsomino*.

Gardenia jasminoides clearly carries an allusion to the jasmine in its specific epithet, which means "jasmine-like", however the genus *Gardenia*, widespread in the tropics of the Old World, is not related. The Cape-jasmine is a native of South China and not South Africa as the name suggests, a good example of how the earliest plants introduced direct from China, round the Cape of Good Hope, long before the Suez Canal was cut, were often attributed to the area of the Cape (while the converse, where South African plants were attributed to the Far East, also occurs). The name *Gardenia* commemorates Dr. Alexander Garden (1730-1791), a native of South Carolina who took his medical degree in Scotland, and was a professor at King's College, New York, the forerunner of Columbia University. Not hardy in areas subject to frost, it is nevertheless widely grown as a conservatory plant, and cherished for the sweet fragrance of its flowers. In fact, as with *Gelsemium*, it is the scented flowers which have brought the name jasmine into use.

In 1588 we find the early botanist Cesalpino referring to the French lilac as *Jeseminum caeruleum Arabum*, and quite early on, lilac and mock-orange came to be called jasmine, but although the names of these two plants are still confused, at least in English speaking countries they have almost lost the general association with jasmine, except that on rare occasions one may still find the Persian lilac referred to as the Persian jasmine (a full circle of confusion, considering that jasmine was originally a Persian name anyway). Often, when a change in the botanical name of a plant has caused annoyance, one may hear it suggested that common names are better and more stable, but they may be too stable. The case of these three different plants is a good example. The mock-oranges are often called syringas while the lilac bears *Syringa* as its botanically correct generic name. A mix-up that goes back to the earliest use of the name syringa and shows how the usage of names persists over centuries; *Syringa* has not been applied to mock-oranges in learned works since the 18th century.

A surprising number of plants in the periwinkle family, the *Apocynaceae*, bear the name jasmine. Crepe-jasmine is the name most usually given to the double

form of *Ervatamia divaricata* (or, as it used to be called, *Tabernaemontana* coronaria*), a shrub which is commonly grown in the tropics and bears white, crepe-like flowers which are sweetly fragrant at night. Better known, perhaps, as it is also grown more frequently under glass in temperate regions, is *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, the Chinese-star-jasmine or Confederate-jasmine, a climber with opposite leaves and pure white fragrant flowers, a native of southern China. In tropical areas throughout the world it is also grown in the open and, judging from the number of specimens one encounters with the botanical name *Jasminum* attached to them, must often be confused with the true jasmines. That common names can be confusing is again borne out by those given to this species, for the name Confederate jasmine is also given to *Jasminum nitidum* and star jasmine (although without the epithet Chinese) is the common name for *J. multiflorum*.

Perhaps the best known of the plants in this family to which the name jasmine is sometimes applied is the frangipani or temple tree, *Plumeria acuminata*. It is native to tropical America but now planted throughout the tropics of the world, and famed for its sweet scent. Because it develops into a small tree and bears beautiful fragrant flowers it has also been called the tree-jasmine, while its sister species, the red frangipani, *P. rubra*, is occasionally referred to as the red-jasmine. Within this family, and less well known perhaps, are the Chilean-jasmine, *Mandevilla suaveolens*, a native of Argentina, and the poison-jasmine or bushman's poison, *Acokanthera venenata* of South Africa, both with fragrant white flowers.

Species of the genus *Cestrum* from the American tropics are often called jessamines. The day-blooming jessamine is *C. diurnum*, and the night-blooming jessamine, *C. nocturnum*, because one is sweetly scented by day and the other by night. However, the name night-jasmine has also been given to another plant, this time a native of India, *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*, best known as the tree-of-sorrow. But neither of these should be confused with the jasmín-nightshade, *Solanum jasminoides*, for the common name here is a translation of the Latin and refers, not to any scent the flowers produce, but to its climbing habit and the profusion of white, somewhat jasmine-like, flowers it produces.

No attempt is being made to list every plant recorded in the literature, to which the name jasmine has become attached. It is almost endless, especially if one considers usage in French, German, Spanish and other languages too, but four further unusual examples may be of interest. Orange-jasmine is a name given to a species of *Murraya*, *M. paniculata*, a member of the orange family from tropical Asia with flowers which, in scent, resemble a jasmine, rather than orange-

* There is, of course, no end to the ramifications that can be followed up when one is considering the usages and meanings of names, whether common or botanical, but it is worth digressing for a moment, perhaps, to consider this rather unwieldy but euphonious name *Tabernaemontana*. It has its origin in the days when scholars regularly latinized their names and Jakob Theodor of Bergzabern (c. 1520-1590), physician and early botanical author of Heidelberg, took his name from that of his town when latinized, i.e. *Tabernaemontanus*. Later the genus was named in his honor.

blossom. Jasmine-tobacco is apparently used on occasion for *Nicotiana alata* var. *grandiflora* (*N. affine*) and blue-jasmine is the sweet scented, blue flowered, *Clematis crispa*, native in the southeastern U.S.A. Lastly, the rock-jasmine bears no resemblance to the true jasmine apart from the particular odor of its flowers. The rock-jasmines comprise the herbaceous genus *Androsace*, and are native to high mountain areas throughout the northern hemisphere. One of the best known species is *A. Chamaejasme*, whose epithet means "dwarf" or "ground jasmine".

Finally, mention may be made of a few botanical names which incorporate the name jasmine. *Jasminanthus* is a later synonym for the sweetly fragrant and very popular *Stephanotis*; *Jasminochyla*, in the periwinkle family, is a small genus closely related to *Landolphia* and, in the same family, *Jasminonerium* is a synonym of *Carissa*; *Jasminoides* is a synonym of *Lycium*, the matrimony vines, many of which are sometimes called false jasmine, especially in France; while a small genus of cacti, endemic to the remote Galapagos Islands, has been named *Jasminocereus*.

Such a diverse array of plants have come to be associated with the name jasmine, and, although it appears that the majority have tropical or subtropical associations and many are climbers, one may say that their general and most outstanding characteristic is the sweet, deliciously fragrant, scent produced by their flowers.

P. S. GREEN



In anticipation of its approaching 100th anniversary, the Arnold Arboretum is preparing a biography of Charles Sprague Sargent, the first director, and a history of the Arnold Arboretum. We would be grateful to readers who can suggest sources of letters written by Professor Sargent, or of material pertinent to the development of the Arboretum. Kindly address replies to Miss Stephanie Sutton, Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts 02130.