

Tale from the Garden!

Hypericum 'Hidcote' is a stunning, vibrant coloured plant that brings a splash of summer to the garden whilst attracting local bees and butterflies. It is commonly known as St John's wort & is a stunning ornamental hedging shrub that makes a beautiful feature in any garden. There are quite a few wonderful examples in Stokesley at the moment, Northfield Drive for one! Hypericum 'Hidcote' showcases attractive bright yellow flowers from May right through to August, which sit above rich, dark green foliage. It's the perfect garden plant to bring summer colours and vibrancy to your garden.



From the time of the ancient Greeks down through the Middle Ages, the plant was considered to be imbued with magical powers and was used to ward off evil and protect against disease. As a practical folk-remedy, it has been used widely to heal wounds, remedy kidney troubles, and alleviate nervous disorders, even insanity, and recent research makes a provocative statement about the ancient uses of St. John's wort by showing that it is a modern protector against depression and virus infection - two modern demons in their own right.

St. John's wort is native to Europe, West Asia, North Africa, Madeira and the Azores, and is naturalized in many parts of the world, notably North America and Australia. The plant spreads rapidly by means of runners or from the prodigious seed production and can invade pastures, disturbed sites, dirt roads, the sides of roads and highways, and sparse woods.

The common name, St. John's wort, is obviously a reference to St. John. Its earliest use may date back to the 6th century AD when, according to Gaelic tradition, the missionary St. Columba always carried a piece of St. John's wort because of his great regard for St. John. Some early Christian authors claimed that red spots, symbolic of the blood of St. John, appeared on leaves of Hypericum on August 29, the anniversary of the saint's beheading, while others considered that the best day to pick the plant was on June 24, the day of St. John's feast. In the Christian tradition, St. John represents light, hence the flowers were taken as a reminder of the sun's bounty.

St. John's wort was used in early pre-Christian religious practices in England, and it has many legends written about it. Because of its bright yellow colour, it was often associated with the sun and was often used for purposes of divination - for every situation from determining how long members of a family would live to testing one's chances for matrimony. To predict their chances for marital bliss, young girls were in the habit of plucking a sprig of flowers - if the flowers were fresh in the morning, their chances were good, if wilted, a dismal outcome was predicted. This poem is translated from the German, where this custom was also practiced:

"The young maid stole through the cottage door,
And blushed as she sought the plant of power.
'Thou silver glow-worm, oh! Lend me thy light,
I must gather the mystic St. John's Wort to-night;
The wonderful herb whose leaf will decide
If the coming year shall see me a bride."

The tops of Hypericum were also considered effective for keeping away undesirable influences and bringing luck. For instance, one belief was that bringing the flowers of St. John's wort into the house on a

midsummer eve would protect one from the evil eye, banish witches, promote good fortune and protect the house from fire. Another belief was that if one slept with a piece of the plant under one's pillow on St. John's Eve, "the Saint would appear in a dream, give his blessing, and prevent one from dying during the following year". The favour St. John's wort enjoyed is well expressed in the following old English poem:

"St. John's wort doth charm all the witches away.

If gathered at midnight on the saint's holy day.

And devils and witches have no power to harm

Those that do gather the plant for a charm:

Rub the lintels and post with that red juicy flower

No thunder nor tempest will then have the power

To hurt or to hinder your houses: and bind

Round your neck a charm of a similar kind."

As we look forward to 'Freedom Day' tomorrow, when England will move into the final stage of easing Covid restrictions & we take personal responsibility for our welfare, we know it comes with a health warning – the coronavirus continues to carry risks. So let's proceed with caution & care. When we wake up in the morning remember the 'bounty' of the sun & bear these thoughts in mind:

Today I saw the sun arise quietly from its starry bed,

And in that inspiring moment, it aroused my somnolent head.

I gazed amazed at God's creation. Mesmerized by the stunning view:

The dazzling red, the glowing gold, the bright brilliance of the blue.

The dew on the grass glittered like gems to these enchanted eyes.

The birds took wing for dawn's first flight upon hearing the trees soft sighs.

The drowsy stars and moon slipped home to recline in their cloudy bed.

Then, there in the warm, sweet sunrise, all my dubious doubts had fled.

For this is a day God's given me, and I shall live it without fear.

Warmed by the comfort of The Son, and by knowing that He is near.

The Apostle John presents Jesus as a great light entering a dark world. His light would shine so brightly that the opposition and lies of those living in darkness would not be able to overcome him (John 1 v4-5). In John 8 v12 Jesus applies the title to himself while debating with the Jews and states: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Light is what darkness isn't. It is hope, it is promise, it's the future; like water it is clean, it is also truth, things not being hidden, things not being compromised, it is openness. Light as a concept, dispelling darkness, overcoming the work of evil, revealing of secrets, releasing from oppression and guilt; it is a little painful, awkward, but in these wonderful days of summer, we know the power of light to raise our spirits, to look up and out and forward and to aspire, to dare and to have courage, to be our best selves.