

## It's a Gardener's World!

The rose family (Rosaceae) is a large clan of dozens of species and thousands of hybrids. It is one of the most famous flowers in the world prized for its beauty and fragrance. Rose petals are made into scented sachets, distilled into rosewater, and sold as expensive oils and perfumes. But the rose is not just a pretty face – it is a wild edible that can be eaten from root to tip. The flowers flavour cakes, jellies, puddings, syrups and wine. The fruits, or rosehips, are added to salads, sauces, soups and teas. It is a medicinal plant too. Around the world, the gentle healing properties of rose make a valuable addition to the natural apothecary cabinet.

Britain's native wild roses have been open to discussion by botanists for years, because of the wide variations between different species and hybrids. However, most agree on five distinct species: dog rose (*Rosa canina*), field rose (*Rosa arvensis*), sweet briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*), burnet rose (*Rosa spinosissima*), and downy rose (*Rosa villosa*).

It is the dog rose, a scrambling, prickly climber with delicate, whitish-pink flowers, who is the topic of this piece. There is a thick hedge of dog rose on the corner of a house on Rosehill Drive, near Lady Hullock's Court. Like all wild roses, the dog rose must constantly compete with its cultivated cousins for recognition. Its subtle-scented flowers appear in early summer in shades of white to pink.



Gabrielle Hatfield, in her book 'Hatfield's Herbal: The Curious Stories of Britain's Wild Plants', says the dog rose is one of the longest living plants: "A bush growing in Hildesheim in Germany was said to have been planted there in AD 850 by Emperor Charlemagne's son".

So we don't forget the beauty of a wild rose forever in the shadow of its garden relatives, Hatfield writes: "Viewed from a distance, a flowering English rosebush looks as though a flock of pink butterflies has perched on it ... you see a jewel-like beauty, with a golden crown of stamens protected by delicate petals".

In both ancient Greek and Roman mythology roses are heavily associated with love and beauty. As such roses are a favoured symbol and popular as a tattoo. More recently the dog rose was chosen as the County flower of Hampshire.

Archaeological finds have confirmed that, along with blackberries, rose hips were eaten as early as 2,000 BC. Reportedly called the dog rose due to the belief that the roots should be used if bitten by a rabid dog, this rose also goes by many other names. It is often called 'wild rose' but can be mixed up with other similar looking species. The prickly nature of the plant has also lent it to be called briar-rose and dog briar.

Other sources imply that 'dog' is a corruption of 'dagger' referring to the plant's jagged-edged leaves. One source suggests the 'dog' in dog rose was meant in a derogatory sense, "implying that Dog Rose was of 'little worth' in the garden".

Both alternatives contradict the Greek story of the flower's origins but rest assured, the dog rose is worthy of a place in our history and culture.

This climbing shrub is one of the most commonly spotted wild roses in the UK. In the summer months the pretty pink-white flowers pepper hedgerows, providing an important source of nectar for insects. Later in the year the bright red hips provide food for mammals and birds and are also collected by people to make rosehip syrup.

And mention of Rosehip syrup brings back memories of school – do you remember having it on rice pudding & maybe tapioca? I do! Rosehip syrup was one of the successes that arose out of necessity in the war years. The government was concerned that the unavailability of fruit such as oranges might result in scurvy, a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C. Rosehips are an excellent source of the vitamin & they decided that they should be gathered & used to make syrup, which was then distributed to

groups most at risk including school children. The inclusion of rosehip syrup in school meals continued long after the war & some people have fond memories of rosehip custard.



I also remember, with some hilarity, picking the hips, breaking them open &, as a practical joke/prank, emptying the seeds down an unsuspecting victim's back! The hairs inside the hips made the most wonderful 'itching powder'!

So the dominating theme surrounding this flower is 'pain' & 'pleasure' – the pain of the itch & the pleasure of its health benefits. Stephen Fry once said "The memory of pain soon goes, the memory of pleasure lingers, that is one of life's happier truths." How true!

The Gospel reading from Matthew 18 appears to be about life in the church, but if we consider that there was no formal church when Jesus was telling these stories, 'church' doesn't mean what it often implies today! The Greek word *ekklesia* (literally, 'called out from') could mean a gathering, an assembly or a community. The focus of the Gospel reading is on how we treat one another in our communities, calling out sin, helping one another to live as Jesus wants us to. It might not be easy (it might even be quite painful) to point out the failings of another so that they can mend their ways. But however unpalatable it is, it is our pastoral call & it is the way that we will all receive God's blessing - & that's the pleasure! At a time when we can't gather together in our Church building, we must remember the words of John Wesley – "I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation." It denotes an understanding that the purpose of the church is not just to care for its own members but also to reach out beyond itself to engage with the **world**, to minister to the **world**, to be in mission to the **world**. There's a lot wrong in the world right now, but if we watch over each other with love, there's a lot we can put right!