

Papaver rhoeas

Papaver rhoeas (common names include common poppy,^[2] corn poppy, corn rose, field poppy, Flanders poppy, red poppy, red weed, coquelicot, and, due to its odour, which is said to cause them, as headache and headwark) is a herbaceous species of flowering plant in the poppy family, *Papaveraceae*. This poppy is notable as an agricultural weed (hence the common names including “corn” and “field”) and after World War I as a symbol of dead soldiers.

Before the advent of herbicides, *P. rhoeas* sometimes was so abundant in agricultural fields that it could be mistaken for a crop. However the only species of *Papaveraceae* grown as a field crop on a large scale is *Papaver somniferum*, the opium poppy.

1 Description



The three stages in a common poppy flower: bud, flower and capsule

Papaver rhoeas is a variable, erect annual, forming a long-lived soil seed bank that can germinate when the soil is disturbed. In the northern hemisphere it generally flowers in late spring, but if the weather is warm enough other flowers frequently appear at the beginning of autumn. It grows up to about 70 cm in height. The flowers are large and showy, 50 to 100mm across,^[3] with four petals that are vivid red, most commonly with a black spot at their base. The flower stem is usually covered with coarse hairs that are held at right angles to the surface, helping to distinguish it from *Papaver dubium* in which the hairs are more usually appressed. The capsules are hairless, obovoid in shape, less than twice as tall as they are wide, with a stigma at least as wide as the capsule. Like many other species of *Papaver*, the plant exudes white to yellowish latex when the tissues are broken.^[4]

2 Natural history

Its origin is not known for certain. As with many such plants, the area of origin is often ascribed by Americans to Europe, and by northern Europeans to southern Europe. Its native range includes West Asia, North Africa and Europe.^{[5][6]} It is known to have been associated with agriculture in the Old World since early times and has had an old symbolism and association with agricultural fertility. It has most of the characteristics of a successful weed of agriculture. These include an annual lifecycle that fits into that of most cereals, a tolerance of simple weed control methods, the ability to flower and seed itself before the crop is harvested, and the ability to form a long-lived seed bank. The leaves and latex have an acrid taste and are mildly poisonous to grazing animals.

A sterile hybrid with *Papaver dubium* is known, *P. x hungaricum*, that is intermediate in all characters with *P. rhoeas*.^[4]

3 Cultural usage

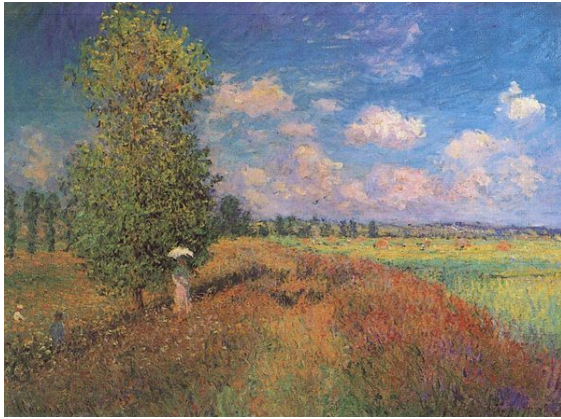
See also: Remembrance poppy

Due to the extent of ground disturbance in warfare dur-



United States commemorative stamp depicting Moina Michael and corn poppies

ing World War I, corn poppies bloomed in between the trench lines and no man's lands on the Western front. Poppies are a prominent feature of "In Flanders Fields" by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, one of the most frequently quoted English-language poems composed during the First World War. During the 20th century, the wearing of a poppy at and before Remembrance Day each year became an established custom in English



Claude Monet, "Summer Field of Coquelicots", 1875



An example of the artificial Flanders poppy which has been distributed by the millions throughout New Zealand by the RSA for Anzac Day activities and other days of remembrance.

speaking western countries. It is also used at some other dates in some countries, such as at appeals for Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand.

This poppy appears on a number of postage stamps, coins, banknotes, and national flags, including:

- Two hundred lei (Romanian banknote)
- Canadian twenty-dollar note (2012) and Canadian ten-dollar note (2001)
- some commemorative Canadian twenty-five cent coins in 2004 and 2008
- Great Britain commemorative stamps 2000-2009: 2007 Lest we forget - 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme

The common or corn poppy was voted the county flower

of Essex and Norfolk in 2002 following a poll by the wild plant conservation charity Plantlife.^[7]

3.1 Persian literature

In Persian literature, red poppies, especially red corn poppy flowers, are considered the flower of love. They are often called the eternal lover flower. In classic and modern Persian poems, the poppy is a symbol of people who died for love (Persian: راه عشق).

Many poems interchange 'poppy' and 'tulip' (Persian: لاله).

[I] was asking the wind in the field of tulips during the sunrise: whose martyrs are these bloody shrouded?

[The wind] replied: Hafez, you and I are not capable of this secret, sing about red wine and sweet lips.

3.2 Urdu literature

In Urdu literature, red poppies, or "Gul-e-Lalah", are often a symbol of martyrdom, and sometimes of love.

4 Uses

The commonly grown decorative Shirley Poppy is a cultivar of this plant. *P. rhoeas* contains the alkaloid rhoeadine which is a mild sedative.

5 See also

- Poppy
- Coquelicot
- Remembrance Day
- *The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino*
- Corn poppy with lamb
- White poppy (symbol)

6 References

- [1] Linné, Carl von (1753). *Species Plantarum*. Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius. p. 507.
- [2] "BSBI List 2007" (xls). Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. Retrieved 2014-10-17.

- [3] Blamey, M.; Fitter, R.; Fitter, A (2003). *Wild flowers of Britain and Ireland: The Complete Guide to the British and Irish Flora*. London: A & C Black. p. 32. ISBN 978-1408179505.
- [4] Stace, C.A. (2010). *New flora of the British isles* (Third ed.). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. p. 88. ISBN 9780521707725.
- [5] Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
- [6] European Garden Flora, vol. IV
- [7] “County Flowers | Wild plants”. Plantlife. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

7 External links

- Malta Wild Plants - *Papaver rhoeas*

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