

## Dog Rose *Rosa canina*

### What's in a name?

The name Dog Rose is a direct translation of the latin name '*Rosa canina*'. This is a translation of the Greek word *κυνόροdon* ('*kunórodon*'), which means 'with sharp teeth or thorns' resembling the dog's teeth. The name was also developed out of a belief, during classical times, that the root was the cure for the bite of a mad dog.

The Dog Rose is also known as the 'wild rose', 'briar' or 'witches' briar'. The later name originates in Ireland where it was believed that the plant held magical powers of love, luck, healing, and protection. The Rose is the national flower of England and there are fourteen native wild species.



### Botany & Ecology

This plant grows rapidly during the summer and can reach up to 4m in height if left unchecked. The flowers have five petals, a nice fragrance and deep pink and white colour, and they blossom between June and July. The flowers give way to the 'rose hip' which turn shiny and are a brilliant orange colour when ripe.

The Dog Rose is an important shrub in the wild and can often be found in hedges across the UK. They provide shelter and food for wildlife but it can also be a useful plant in the garden. The nectar-filled flowers attract many insects (bees, hover flies and beetles), which in return attract birds that prey on them. The rosehips are a source of food and vitamins for a range of small mammals once they have dropped from the mother plant.



### Folklore

The folklore associated with this plant has a strong link with the mythology of vampires. It was said that when the flower petals were thrown at vampire, it would be mystically compelled to stop what it was doing and count them. In addition, when a vampire was buried it was common to plant a Dog Rose on top of the grave to prevent resurrection.

*'On a summer's day, in sultry weather,  
Five brethren were born together.  
Two had beards and two had none  
And the other had but half a one.'*

There is an old medieval country riddle called 'The Five Brethren of the Dog Rose' created to aid growers and early pharmacists to identify which wild rose was which. The five sepals (found below the petals), are related to the 'brethren'. Two sepals have whiskers on both sides, two are smooth and the fifth is whiskered on one side only.

### Folk Medicine

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the roots were crushed and the juice ingested to treat the bite of rabid dogs. The raw roots were also fed to goats to aid digestion. The hips are a very good source of Vitamin C and they have long been harvested all over the UK during times of hardship. During the Second World War county councils were required to organise collections using schools, voluntary groups and local WI groups and by the end of the war it was estimated that 2,000 tons of rosehips had been collected and made into syrup. The syrup was used as a supplement for fresh fruit and as a treatment for coughs and colds. It was also given to children just before the onset of winter as a preventative tonic.

Making the syrup was very labour intensive and involved separating the fine hairs from the seeds. Mischievous children would dry the hairs and drop them down each other's backs as they often irritated the skin making it itchy. The hips were also known as 'itchy-coos' in certain parts of the UK.

\*Please note, readers should take advice from a qualified doctor or herbalist before using plants as a cure for ailments.