



Tracing plants in Polish and Greek culture

Lexicon of plants that have existed in our
cultures over the centuries, from antiquity
to the present day



Introduction


The power of plants has always fascinated mankind. The ability to treat diseases with the right plant preparations, infusions of leaves or flowers, tinctures of roots, and medicines of bark was very important. Discovering the medical power of plants continues to inspire our knowledge and science. In the old days, a person who knew the properties of plants and was able to prepare life-saving potions enjoyed great respect.

Herbal experts were called magicians, while in many ancient cultures plants were worshipped.

The healing power of plants, resulting from the active substances contained in them, was not the only reason for the fascination. In ancient Greece, beauty and harmony played a key role in art and life, while aesthetic models were derived from nature. That is why we have beautiful mythological characters, like Narcissus or Adonis whose names have been given to flowers.

Some plants have not healed just the body, but also the





soul, bringing relief in pain and sorrow. Perhaps this is why poppy was created for the Greek goddess Demeter so that she could fall asleep when she was grieving after the loss of her daughter Persephone.

The project *“Leave a trace of nature in your life”* creates a bridge between the beautiful Greek Thessaly and the Low Beskids in the Polish Carpathians. When selecting the plants for this lexicon, we were guided by the presence of their habitats in the project area.

There is no shortage of inspiration in the art of our countries. Despite the distance of 2500 km separating our two observation points (one of them is located in Ropki in the Low Beskids in Poland and the other in Ellassona at the foot of Mount Olympus in Thessaly in Greece) we have discovered a surprisingly large number of common iconic plants, whose presence we mark not only on the natural but also cultural maps of our two countries.

In another part of this publication, we will consider what we can do to ensure that these plants do not disappear from the natural maps and, consequently, from our culture and tradition. Some of the plants described here are indicators of the state of the natural environment, some are typical elements of the landscape that is changing before our eyes, while others are simply at the risk of extinction and therefore are under strict protection.

Perhaps when we discover the utilitarian and symbolic significance of the selected plants, they will become important enough for us to care for and protect them. And here are those plants:

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1. Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* L.).

The name “*Sambucus*” comes from the Greek word “*sambúkē*”, which means a simple wind instrument such as a flute or pipe. When the soft pulp is removed from the centre of the stalk, it becomes hollow, which allows making sounds. Empty stems were also used to blow fire, making them useful in the manufacture of bellows. Both the flowers and fruits of elderberry are valuable herbal resources.

The medicinal properties of elderberry, including its ability to reduce fever, have long been known in Slavic lands. But there were many fears and superstitions, like that it should not be dug up because it would bring misfortune. Since the Middle Ages, the Christian tradition has also said that Judas hanged himself on the branch of the elderberry. The bas-relief depicting this scene can be seen, inter alia, on the façade of Strasbourg Cathedral.



Botanical description: Elderberry is an indicator tree of nitrogen-rich soils. It has odd-pinnate leaves, and in May umbel inflorescences of white flowers, which are loved by beetles, bloom at the ends of young, green stems. The black-purple fruits ripen in late summer. On the bark there are numerous cracks, known as lenticels.

QUIZ

1. What flowers grew from the ground in the places where lightning sent by the thunderous Slavic god Perun struck?

2. Common ivy (*Hedera helix* L.)

In ancient Greece, ivy was an attribute of the god Dionysus, often depicted with a crown of ivy or holding in his hand a thyrsus wrapped in this plant. This thyrsus could proclaim the divine will. According to an ancient tale, ivy protected Dionysus from the sun at his birth and this is still true today: it is a plant that provides shade and shelter. It blooms last, only at the end of summer, so it is an extremely valuable plant for bees, providing them with nectar and pollen when other plants are no longer flowering. The fruit is eaten by the birds until late autumn. All parts of ivy are poisonous.

The Latin name "*Hedera*" means "to attach", which perfectly reflects the character of this plant, which attaches and climbs to grow.

In Lithuanian, ivy refers Perkūnas, and in the Christian tradition, as an evergreen plant, it symbolises immortality.



Botanical description: Ivy is an evergreen climber with adventitious roots and two types of leathery leaves: on non-flowering stems the leaves are five-lobed with a heart-shaped base, while on flowering stems they are elliptical. The plant blooms for the first time after 8 years and its flowers, in spherical umbel inflorescences, release an unpleasant odour. The lignifying shoots develop clinging roots that make it easy for the plant to climb various supports, thanks to which this vine can reach a height of up to 20 m.

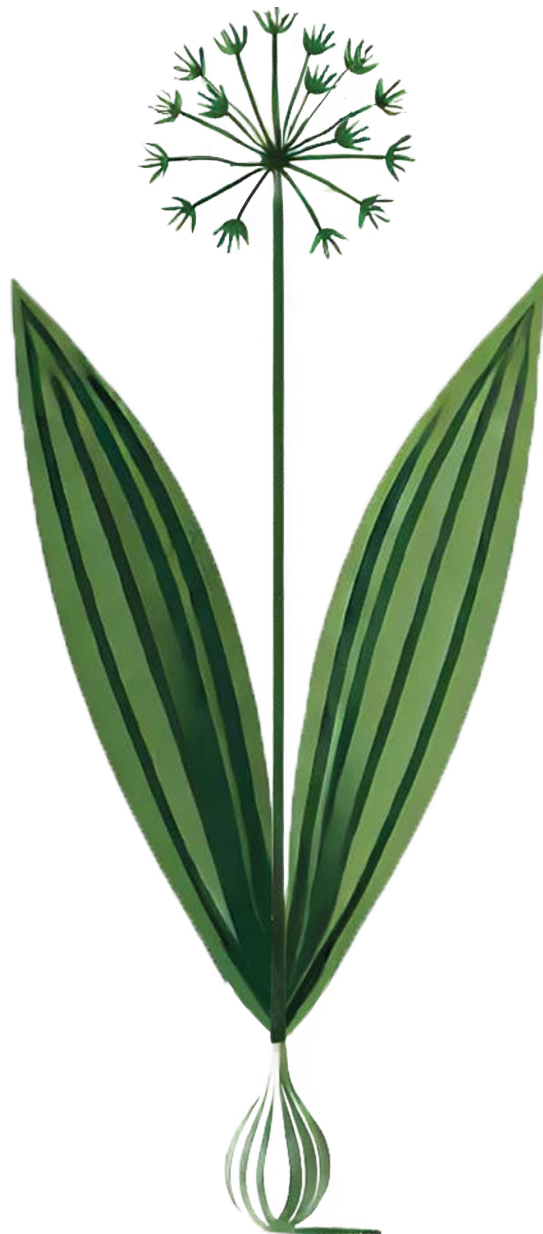
QUIZ

2. What flower name is also a term for a man in love with himself?
Narcyz?

3. Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum* L.)

The Greek physician Dioscorides, in his treatise on medicine from the first century AD, wrote that wild garlic is a cure for snakebite. The second part of the Latin name “*ursinum*” refers to the fact that brown bears loved to eat its bulbs. Animals can recognize plants with medicinal properties, and they can sense them for example by smell. Garlic, as we know, smells very intensively of sulphur compounds, contains strong bactericidal substances and antioxidants.

It is a geophyte that often grows in extensive mats, flowering under trees already in early spring. If you spot one while walking, it's a sign that you're in a rare and unique natural habitat.



Botanical description: Wild garlic is a perennial that grows in extensive mats in the undergrowth of shady, moist deciduous forests. Two young leaves emerge from the bulbs already in early spring and in late March a single flower-bud stem is covered with an umbel of many small, star-shaped, white flowers. All parts of the plant are edible. Wild garlic is a protected plant.

QUIZ

3. From the twigs of what tree are baskets woven?

4. Oak (*Quercus L.*)

In Greece, oak was closely associated with the god Zeus. In one of the most important temples dedicated to Zeus, located in Dodona, near Olympus, prophecies were read from the rustling leaves of an old oak. In ancient Greece, nymphs living in trees were called dryads. It was said that they drew their life force from trees. When the tree was cut down, it was said that the dryad also died.

In the myth of Baucis and Philemon according to Ovid, once upon a time gods disguised as men knocked on the door of a house: these were Zeus and Hermes. The old couple, although at first glance they did not know who their guests were, received them with due respect. As a reward, the gods made them priests of the temple, and upon their death, they were changed into an intertwining pair of trees: Baucis became a linden and Philemon became an oak.

In Slavic beliefs and rituals, the oak was at the centre of rites, as it connected heaven and earth.

Unfortunately, oak trees in the Carpathians are rare and climate change causes that they become an endangered species, suffering from severe stress related to heat and scarcity of water.

Oak wood has been considered valuable and very durable for centuries. Oak fruits, that is acorns, contain a large amount of starch. Before the introduction of potatoes, acorns were a staple fodder for livestock, especially pigs, in the Carpathians.

Oak bark contains substances necessary for hide tanning.



Botanical description: In the mountains we sometimes find peduncles oaks, tall deciduous trees with massive limbs and alternate, pinnately lobed, leathery leaves with rounded lobes, ear-shaped at the base. In June, flowers appear in spike-shaped inflorescences, from which at the end of summer acorns on long peduncles emerge.

QUIZ

4. From the twigs of what bush simple flutes were made, while its stems were used to blow the fire?

5. Mullein (*Verbascum L.*)

The Greek physician Dioscorides described mullein as an effective remedy for lung diseases. It was believed that the smoke from the burned mullein had the ability to ward off evil powers, which is why it was used to cense ceremonial and ritual sites.

It is said that the Polish name of mullein comes from the name the goddess of wild nature in the pantheon of Slavic deities: Dziejanna. The well-known Polish chronicler Jan Długosz wrote about this goddess in the 15th century, comparing her to the Roman goddess Diana.

In medieval Europe, the flower stalks of mullein were used as torches, called "*Herba Luminaria*" or "*Notre-Dame candles*". Flowers of wild mullein are an irreplaceable source of nectar for bees.



Botanical description: A biennial plant characterized by long stems ending in an inflorescence resembling an ear or cluster, with numerous yellow radiant flowers in bunches. The lower basal leaves are egg-shaped with a heart-shaped base, while the higher leaves are smaller and their petioles are longer.

QUIZ

5. Which plant is the last to bloom at the end of summer, providing pollen and nectar to wild bees?



6. Stemless carline thistle (*Carlina acaulis* L.)

This beautiful plant is found in the mountainous regions of Europe. The Carpathian Mountains are home to stemless carline thistle. The shape of this flower has been a symbol of good luck in many pastoral cultures of Europe. Stemless carline thistle was rumoured to have 9 magical powers – due to the active substances it contains. The inside of the flower, when cooked, is edible and resembles an artichoke in taste. By observing the bracts of the flower head, the weather was predicted, because when they are closed there will be rain, and when they remain open there will be good weather! Stemless carline thistle is a plant in danger of extinction due to changes in land use and rising seasonal temperatures. It used to grow in large numbers on pastures and was eaten by sheep. Today, as the last “redyks”, the traditional autumn trailing of sheep from the pastures to their winter stables, pass through the Carpathian valleys, stemless carline thistle has almost completely disappeared from our Carpathian and probably will never return.



Botanical description: In the centre of a rosette of spiky leaves lying on the ground is a large flower head, loved by bumblebees and grasshoppers, surrounded by silver and cream scales-bracts. This perennial has a lignified root.

QUIZ

6. A plant growing in naturally valuable, often wetland habitats, used since ancient times as a spice in cooking?

A decorative border surrounds the text, consisting of a repeating pattern of stylized iris flowers in various colors (yellow, green, purple, and dark green) and orientations (upside down and right side up).

7. Iridaceae species (*yellow or Siberian iris*) (*Iris L.*).

In ancient Greece, the goddess Persephone and her companions, nymphs, one day picked flowers in a meadow where irises grew. Suddenly Persephone was snatched away by Hades, and only flowers from her bouquet remained on the earth. Thanks to them, we still remember her to this day.

There is also another Greek story in which the goddess Iris spread a rainbow over the earth, and where the rainbow touched the ground, wild irises grew. In the Slavic version of the legend, flowers appeared in places struck by the lightning bolts thrown by the Perun the Thunderer. This is why in some Slavic countries irises are named after the god Perun, and their colours have a specific symbolism: violet symbolizes wisdom, yellow – hope, and white – purity.

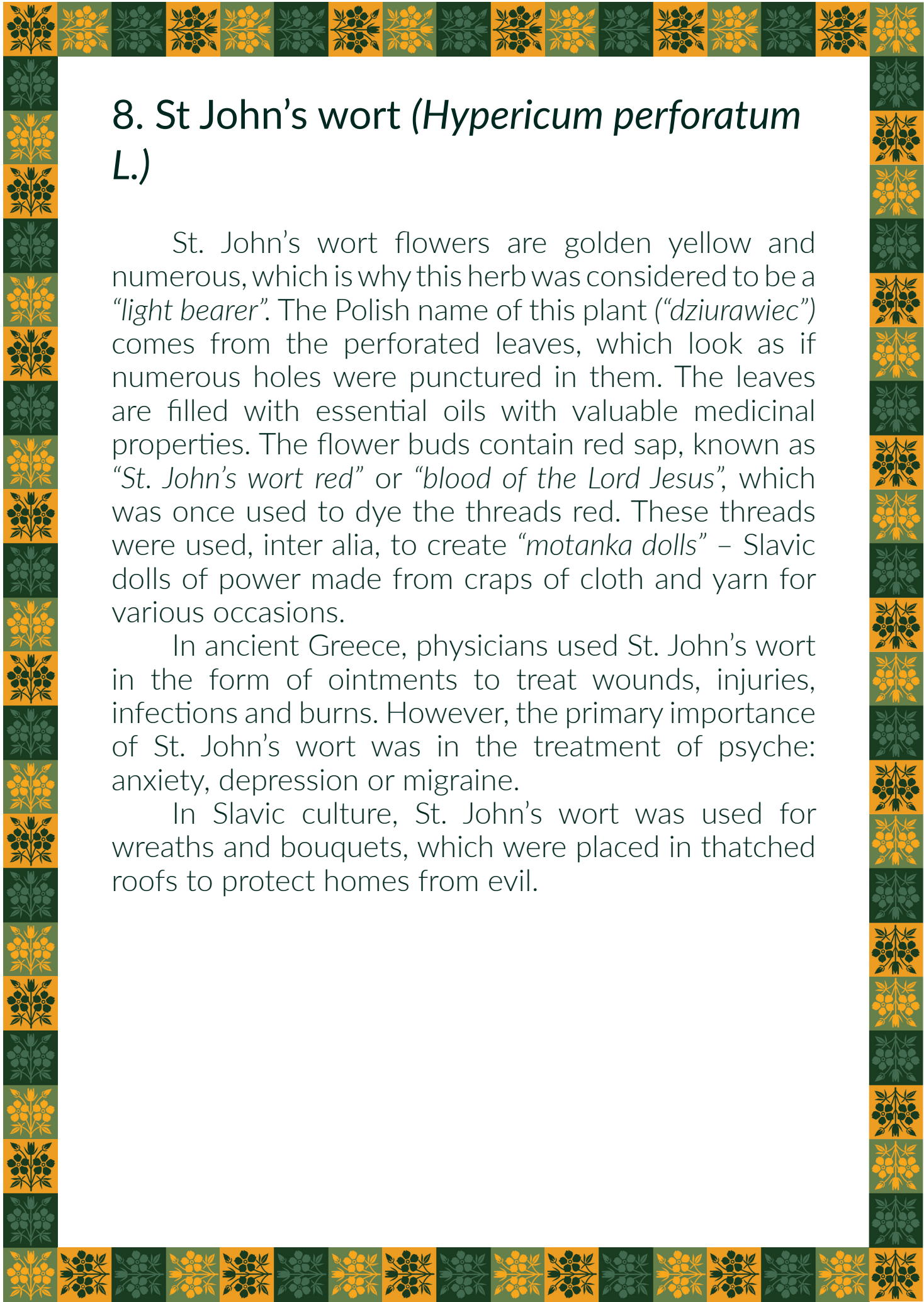
In their natural habitat, these plants grow in alder swamp habitats, wet meadows, near ponds and along rivers, canals and ditches. Unfortunately, in the face of the increasing drought caused by climate change, their survival becomes more and more difficult.



Botanical description: A rhizomatous plant with sabre leaves. It blooms in May and June and can have one or more flowers at the top of the stem. The three outer leaves of the perianth are bent downwards, while the other two or three are raised upwards. The plant is native to the Mediterranean.

QUIZ

7. A tree symbolizing longevity and strength?



8. St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum* L.)

St. John's wort flowers are golden yellow and numerous, which is why this herb was considered to be a "light bearer". The Polish name of this plant ("dziurawiec") comes from the perforated leaves, which look as if numerous holes were punctured in them. The leaves are filled with essential oils with valuable medicinal properties. The flower buds contain red sap, known as "St. John's wort red" or "blood of the Lord Jesus", which was once used to dye the threads red. These threads were used, inter alia, to create "motanka dolls" – Slavic dolls of power made from scraps of cloth and yarn for various occasions.

In ancient Greece, physicians used St. John's wort in the form of ointments to treat wounds, injuries, infections and burns. However, the primary importance of St. John's wort was in the treatment of psyche: anxiety, depression or migraine.

In Slavic culture, St. John's wort was used for wreaths and bouquets, which were placed in thatched roofs to protect homes from evil.



przetłumacz Botanical description: A perennial plant with four-caned, branching stems and five-petaled flowers with lanceolate sepals, gathered in multi-flowered inflorescences at the tops of the stems. The leaves are small and opposite.

QUIZ

8. According to Jan Długosz, she was the goddess of wildlife, what plant is it?

9. Field pansy (*Viola arvensis* Murr.).

Field pansy is a host plant for caterpillars of several butterflies, including the Nymphalidae: Niobe fritillary (*Argynnis Niobe*) and Queen of Spain fritillary (*Issoria lathonia*).

In Slavic culture, fragrant flowers of violets and pansies were woven into wreaths made by girls on Kupala Night. Beautiful and aromatic wreaths were used to decorate doors and gates for the Green week.

In ancient Greece, violets were also used to weave festive wreaths, as the Athenian scholar Theophrastus of Eresos, a friend of Aristotle, wrote about.

Dried violet herb, used as herbal tea, calms nerves and reduces fever. In the form of ointment, it is used to treat various skin conditions such as acne, eczema and dryness.



Botanical description: Violet is a perennial with an ascending, often branched, multi-flowered stem. The flowers are tri-colored and five-petaled. The upper petals are usually purple, while the side and lower petals are yellow or yellow-white. The bracts are pinnatifid and the leaves are lanceolate.

QUIZ

9. What plant with edible flowers is threatened with extinction due to lack of sheep grazing?

10. Hawthorn (*Crataegus*)

Hawthorn blooms in May, and its flowers are pristine white. Like roses and blackberries, hawthorns are commonly called “*thorns*”, because they are all thorny. The Latin name “*Crataegus*”, derived from the Greek “*krátos*”, means “*strength*” and refers to the hardness of hawthorn wood. Beautiful hawthorn flowers have one drawback: their smell is not very pleasant, but nevertheless they were used to weave wreaths for various spring occasions both in Poland and Greece.

It is said that Christ’s crown of thorns was made of hawthorn thorns.

In folk medicine, hawthorn is used, among others, to relieve the symptoms of cardiovascular diseases.

In southern Europe, hawthorns can take woody forms and form groves. In the Carpathian Mountains, pruned hawthorn bushes were used as natural barriers to wild animals and were called “*czyżnie*” (*Rubus fruticosus-Prunetum spinosae*). Hawthorn often grows singly, acting as a pioneer plant in overgrown, uncultivated meadows.

Hawthorns planted on baulks provide shelter and winter food for birds, as their fruits remain on the shrub long after the leaves have fallen, sometimes even until the end of winter.

The fruit is also valuable for humans, because it contains a lot of vitamin C.



Botanical description: a shrub with smooth bark and thorns on the branches. Leaves are alternate, dark green, with indented lobes and serrated tips. From white flowers gathered in a single bundle, dark red fruits with one or two styles grow, depending on the species.

QUIZ

10. What plant's flower buds contain the red sap used to dye threads?

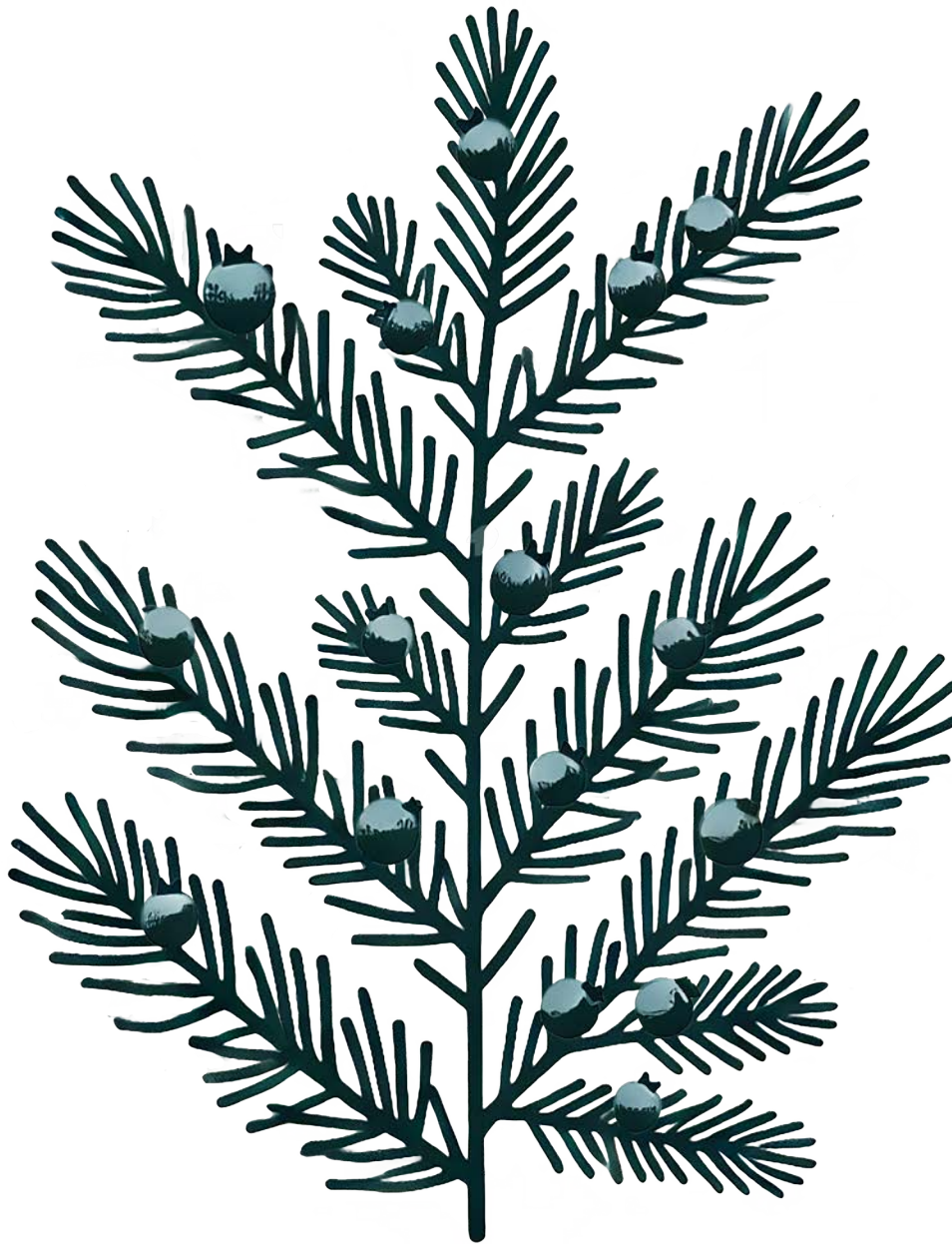


11. Juniper (*Juniperus L.*)

The Polish name of juniper (“*jałowiec*”) suggests that it grows on barren (“*jałowe*” in Polish) soils and sands. Juniper berries are a favourite food of fieldfares and Bohemian waxwings. In Europe, also other birds such as the mistle thrush, common blackbird and song thrush often feed on them. Since ancient times juniper berries have been used as a culinary spice, often replacing pepper, giving dishes a slightly balsamic aroma.

The ancient Slavs burned juniper branches, believing that juniper smoke was effective in driving away upirs, strzygas, bieses and other demons, and also cleanses the air of “evil”. Juniper resin is still used today to make incense called sandarac, which is employed during church services.

Junipers in the Low Beskids are disappearing along with the traditional way of using meadows for grazing sheep: they used to be numerous, but today there are becoming increasingly scarce.



Botanical description: Juniper is an evergreen shrub of columnar structure, with short, prickly needles on twigs. Every 2–3 years, small female cones ripen on the twigs, which turn blue-purple in colour.

QUIZ

11. Plants from which wreaths were woven and on which valuable species of butterflies feed?

12. Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* L.)

In Greek mythology, the ash trees were home to Meliae nymphs. When Uranus was mutilated by Cronus, the drops of his blood that fell to the ground gave birth to Erinyes (goddesses of vengeance) and Meliae nymphs. The Greek goddess of justice Nemesis sometimes held a branch of ash tree in her hand.

The Greeks used ash wood to make javelins. It is said that Achilles fought at Troy with a spear made from this tree.

Polish medieval knights used lances made from ash wood. Uhlans, the famous Polish cavalry, used ash lances during charges.

The ancient Slavs worshipped ash trees in sacred groves and used ash wood to make strong arrows for their bows.

In folk culture, dried ash leaves were steamed, while panicles of winged seeds were marinated in apple cider vinegar with cinnamon and ginger. Ash leaves were used instead of quinine.



Botanical description: Common ash is a tree with compound leaves, consisting of 7–15 pointed leaflets, arranged opposite. In spring, black, mossy flower buds form on the twigs before the leaves appear. The fruits of the ash are winged seeds, grouped in clusters.

QUIZ

12. From wood of which tree were spears, lances and arrows made in the past?



13. Fir (*Abies Mill.*)

In Greek mythology, the nymph Elate, whom the satyr Pan tried to seduce, turned into a fir tree. Since then Pan has often been depicted with a fir-tree branch. The ancient Greeks made the Trojan horse from the fir tree and used it to capture Troy.

Fir is the primary carpentry material in the Polish Carpathians. Traditional wooden houses, known as “*chyzas*”, in the Low Beskids were built from fir logs.

For Slavs, fir was a New Year’s tree during the Koliada. Koliada is an ancient festival of the winter solstice, celebrated by the Slavs on the longest night of the year around December 21. Fir branches were hung with apples and nuts and then placed in homes to bring abundance and drive away evil powers.



Botanical description: In the Carpathians it creates beautiful fir groves. These soaring trees have grayish, smooth trunks. Fir needles are short, flattened, single, dark green on top, and with two silvery-white stripes on the bottom. The cones grow only at the top of the tree, standing upward on the top side of the tallest branches.

QUIZ

13. The fruit of which shrub is a favourite food of fieldfares and Bohemian waxwings?



14. Yarrow (*Achillea L.*)

Yarrow was named *Achillea* in Latin in honour of the Greek hero Achilles. The plant has been known for its medicinal properties since ancient times. According to mythology, Achilles learned to use it from the centaur Chiron and employed it during the Trojan War to treat wounds of his soldiers.

Yarrow was a valuable herb, gathered for bouquets and wreaths on the occasion of various holidays of the Slavic calendar.

Christian tradition has it that when Joseph cut himself in his carpenter's workshop, the child Jesus went for a yarrow to dress his wound.

Yarrow is a typical plant of our semi-wild Carpathian meadows, very resistant to climate change.



Botanical description: Yarrow is a perennial with pinnate leaves and baskets of tiny white flowers, arranged in a dense umbel inflorescence. This plant gives off a characteristic sweet, spicy odour.

QUIZ

14. What plant did Achilles use to treat the wounds of his soldiers during the Trojan War?



15. Oregano (*Origanum vulgare* L.)

Oregano is an aromatic plant that plays an important role in the tradition of gathering herbs to be blessed on the day of Our Lady of the Herbs (Assumption of Mary). This important Carpathian feast falls on August 15. Wild flowers and herbs from our fields and the natural meadows of the Beskids are blessed in Catholic and Orthodox churches. In the past, oregano was considered to be the “*mother of all herbs*”, and its flowering shoot tops were harvested for infusions.

Varieties of this plant found in southern Europe, in countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, are richer in essential oils and are commonly used as spices in Mediterranean cuisine. It is also used in Herbes de Provence.

The powdered leaves of oregano were formerly used as snuff. It is also an indispensable remedy for a sore neck. Thanks to the content of anaesthetic oils, the plant was simply picked up and wrapped around the sore neck.

The plant is also used for dyeing fabrics black or, when using only the flowers, orange.



Botanical description: A perennial plant that forms turf, with a leafy, erect stem and small pink flowers gathered at the top of each stem in a dense inflorescence. Each of the pink flowers forming the inflorescence has a three-lobed lower lip.

QUIZ

15. What powdered plant was used as snuff?



16. Small-leaved linden (*Tilia cordata* Mill.)

Oceanus' daughter Philyra, who was ashamed of her centaur son named Chiron, asked the gods to take away her human form. The gods heard her request, and she was turned into a linden tree.

Linden is a sacred tree of the Slavs. Linden trees were planted near shrines and churches. They were called trees of the Mother of God and their branches were used to decorate houses for Pentecost. Linden also played an important role in folk medicine. Polish name of the linden tree ("*lipa*") comes from "*lipiec*" (July), because that's when it blooms beautifully. Linden inflorescences used to be collected and used in our region to prepare an infusion, which was one of the basic winter drinks when tea was not known yet. Soft linden wood was used to make toys, instruments and even hives, as the scent of this tree attracts bees. From linden phloem slippers called "*łapcie*" were woven. In the 15th century the master Wit Stwosz (Veit Stoss) made a beautiful altar in St. Mary's Church in Krakow from linden wood.



Botanical description: Small-leaved linden is a long-lived deciduous tree with alternate leaves sharpened at the edges, with elongated tips. It blooms in clusters containing 5 to 10 small white flowers embedded on a single stalk, attached to the bract – a wing of a different colour, at the end of a limp young twig.

QUIZ

16. In wood of which tree Wit Stwosz (Veit Stoss) carved a beautiful altar in St. Mary's Church in Kraków?

17. Common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas* L.)

Poppy flowers have been present in rituals dedicated to the goddess Demeter for centuries, and cake baked with poppy was an important part of the ceremonies.

In Slavic cuisine, we prepare poppy seed cakes and cheesecakes, and every day we savour poppy seed buns. We also have excellent croissants prepared for the St. Martin's Day in Greater Poland.

The ancient Greeks valued poppy seeds for their calming and analgesic properties. In art and literature, these scarlet flowers often symbolized rest and healing, while the beauty of their delicate petals have always been fascinating. Poppy is a synanthropic plant, often found in agricultural crops.

The poppy is also a decorative motif in Polish folk art.



Botanical description: Field poppy is an annual plant. The flowers are scarlet-red, single, embedded on long, limp stems that have trifoliate sessile leaves. They do not yield nectar, but produce a large amount of pollen. The seed capsule, called poppy head, has small holes on the top. Over time it dries out and the seeds are spread by the wind.

QUIZ

17. A synanthropic plant often found in cereals?



18. Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus* L.)

According to Apollodorus, raspberries owe their beautiful colour to a nymph named Idaeia – hence the Latin name of this plant is *Rubus idaeus*. Legend has it that Idaeia, when picking raspberries, pricked her finger with thorn of a bush, and her blood dropped on the white fruit, giving it a pinkish-red colour.

In Polish colloquial speech, we say of a beautiful girl that she is like a raspberry. Raspberry appears in many folk songs about beautiful maidens, while raspberry shoots were woven into wreaths for the day of Our Lady of the Herbs (Assumption of Mary).

Wild raspberry grows on forest glades and forest edges. It remains one of the most widely used wild plants among the Slavs and thus its name is almost identical in many Slavic languages. Raspberry fruits can be eaten raw or processed into juices, syrups and desserts.



Botanical description: Raspberry is a perennial plant with long, limp, thorny shoots. The leaves are odd-pinnate, jagged on the edges, and consist of 3 to 7 leaflets. The fruits are fleshy, indehiscent, aggregate, formed from a single multi-petalled flower, and are composed of a few to a dozen small drupes.

QUIZ

18. Bush with pink-red fruits growing on the edge of forests?



19. Corn mint (*Mentha arvensis* L.)

Once upon a time Hades, the god of the underworld, traversing the earth in his golden chariot, dazzled and seduced the nymph Minthe. Hades' jealous wife, Persephone, turned the beautiful nymph into a fragrant mint.

However, mint is known primarily as a symbol of hospitality and kindness.

Corn mint with round leaves is one of several varieties growing wild in the Low Beskids. It was gathered for bouquets and wreaths. It was believed to protect against spells during Midsummer Night's rituals, and its smoke was used to fume homes and livestock, bringing health due to its disinfectant properties.

Mint infusion is a soothing drink with a refreshing aroma and taste. In Polish and Greek cuisine it is often used to impart aroma and taste to dishes and sweets. In Polish cuisine, mint leaves are added to salads and dumplings.

The disinfecting properties of mint are known to many birds, like tits, which bring its leaves to their nests. The intense smell of mint suppresses the scent of chicks, which helps them hide from predators.



Botanical description: Corn mint is a perennial with oppositely paired leaves and flowers gathered in dense pseudowhorls, seated at the base of the leaves. The pinkish calyx-shaped flowers are hairy, as is the entire plant. It blooms from May to September.

QUIZ

19. A plant whose leaves are used to prepare refreshing infusions with antiseptic properties and a very pleasant, cooling taste?

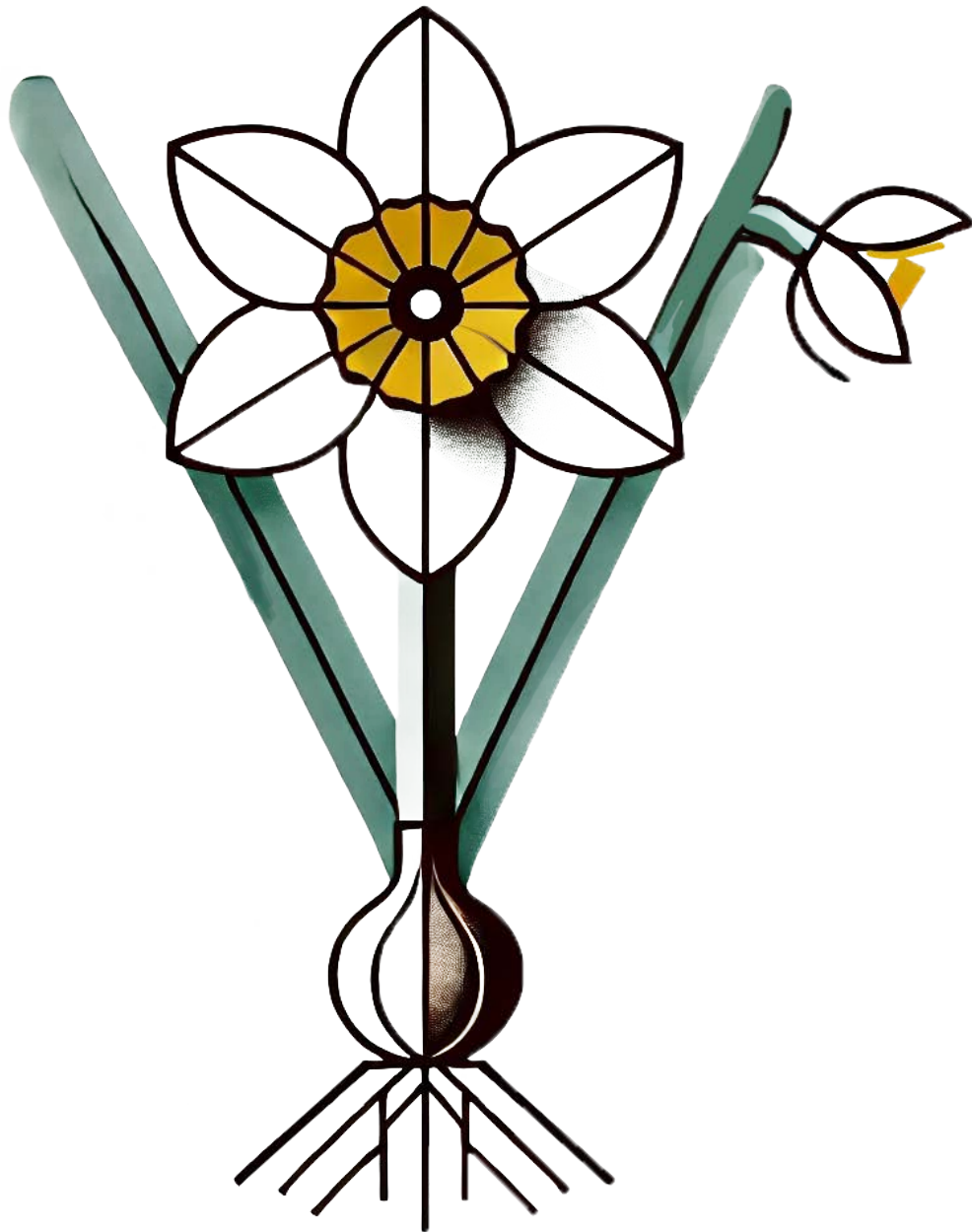


20. Narcissi (*Narcissus L.*)

Narcissi are native to southern Europe and do not grow wild in the Polish part of the Carpathians, however they can be found in the Alps or the Vosges. Once people used to plant them in home gardens, and when they left their homes (in the Low Beskids they were forced to do so: the native inhabitants of the area were displaced between 1945 and 1946), narcissi continued to bloom every spring for the next few decades. They are so beautiful that almost 10,000 varieties have been bred to date. The name “*narcissus*” probably comes from the Greek word “*narkē*”, meaning numbness, because the bulbs of these flowers are poisonous and contain alkaloids that are intended to deter herbivores.

There is a very old and well-known story from Greece about a young man named Narcissus who did not want to fall in love with the nymph Echo, so he was punished by the goddess Nemesis: when he saw his reflection in a silvery spring, he could no longer take his eyes off it and gazed at it until he turned into a Narcissus flower.

In Poland, one of the varieties of narcissus, daffodils, became a symbol of the Jewish uprising in the ghetto during World War II.



Botanical description: Bulb perennial with narrow, grassy leaves and a stem containing sticky sap (warning: poisonous!). One flower, with six pale yellow petals and a long funnel-shaped tube in the centre, blooms on each stem. It blooms in April and May.

QUIZ

20. Fruit of which plants is the delicacy for goldfinch?



21. Creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense* L.) and brook thistle (*Cirsium rivulare*)

Both species are now considered common weeds. They are commonly found in the Carpathians, especially on moist hay meadows, which are called *Cirsietum rivularis* meadows.

They have purple flowers and prickly leaves. In our region, the young leaves were picked in the spring, before flowering, and used to prepare “pre-harvest dishes”, eaten after the difficult winter period, when the pantries were already empty and hunger was knocking at the door. At that time, other young shoots and leaves, such as nettles and goosefoots, were also gathered to make something to eat.

Thistle is a host plant for the painted lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*). Bees collect pollen and a large amount of nectar from the purple flowers. The flowers have a musky, sweet aroma that attracts many butterflies. Seeds of thistles are a valuable food for granivorous birds, such as the goldfinch.

Rare and protected species of wild orchids often grow in wet *Cirsietum rivularis* meadows in the Carpathians.



Botanical description: Perennial with purple flowers and erect, branched inflorescence stems. At the tops of the stems, tubular flowers develop from husked buds, gathered in bunches and set on an open basket, also covered with a husk. The leaves are large, pinnate, dentate and spiny, while spines are also found on the leaf tips and on the stem.

QUIZ

21. From the inflorescences of what tree is cough syrup made?



22. European red pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.)

A nymph named Pitys (the Greek word “pitys” means pine) preferred to become a tree rather than to be seduced by the satyr Pan.

In ancient times, sacred pine groves grew throughout Europe. From Scandinavia to Germanic and Slavic countries, pine trees, rich in resin, have been a symbol of life, longevity and health. Pine torches were used to incense houses, especially during Christmas.

Young pine shoots are used to make cough syrups. The chopped shoots are covered with sugar, which causes them to release juice and create an aromatic, resinous syrup, perfect for the common cold. The shoots themselves are a tasty, sweet snack for roe and deer, who eagerly gnaw the tops of young pines.

Pine wood was used, inter alia, for the masts of ships and as an excellent material for carpentry and joinery work.



Botanical description: Coniferous trees forming thermophilous pine forests. The needles are grayish-green, two in a fascicle, and rigid. The cones are erect, usually arranged in pairs opposite each other, initially green, and do not mature until the following year.

QUIZ

22. From the bark of what tree can an effective antipyretic be prepared?



23. Silver poplar (*Populus alba* L.)

The Latin term “*alba*” means “white” and refers to the whitish bark of the tree and the silvery white colour of the underside of its leaves. This bark contains salicin and is used as an antipyretic.

In Greek mythology, the poplar, known as “*leukê*”, is the tree most strongly associated with the underworld. Hades fell in love with Leuce and took her to the Elysium, even though he knew she was mortal. When Leuce died, he transformed her into a silver poplar tree with bi-coloured leaves.



Botanical description: A lofty tree most commonly found in river valleys, with characteristic lenticels on the bark and light-coloured limbs. The leaves are palmately lobed, dark green on top and white underneath. Fruits with seeds are covered with down, which in the spring is spread by the wind.

QUIZ

23. What tree yields red fruits, which are used to make preparations for heart diseases?

24. White willow (*Salix alba*)

Near the entrance to Hades there was a sacred grove of willows and poplars. Various rituals dedicated to the deities took place in the sacred groves as well as at other sacred sites.

In Slavic mythology it is said that willows grew on the border of two elements: water and earth, and guarded the entrances to the land of the underworld called Nav, located under the roots of the trees. It is said that the tree hollows in willows led to this underground world. Among the willows one could also meet illusive rusalki.

In Poland, white willows usually grow together with black poplars along rivers and streams, creating very valuable natural habitats called riparian woodlands. These trees are very closely associated with the landscape of the Polish countryside, because they were often planted along roads and on the baulks.

Many everyday objects, such as baskets, are still woven from willow twigs called wicker. Willow bark rolled up can be used to make a simple pipe instrument. At Easter, bouquets are composed from twigs with catkins – undeveloped buds covered with silvery hairs. Willows can be pruned every 2–3 years. All branches of the crown are then cut off and the crown takes on a spherical shape the following year. This tree is very susceptible to lack of water. wrapped in down emerge from the green catkins.



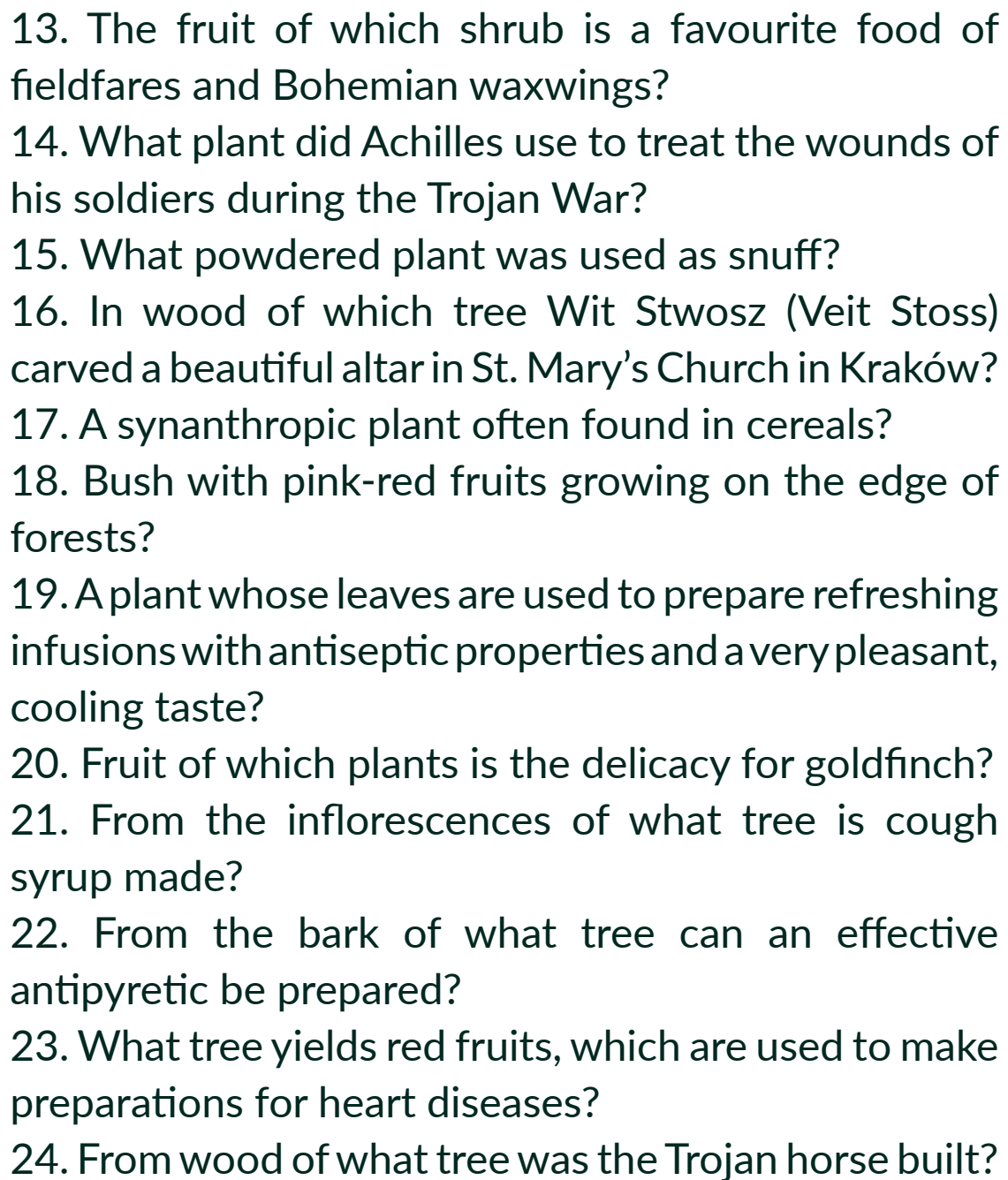
Botanical description: deciduous tree with longitudinally cracked bark, flexible branches and lanceolate leaves that are bright and mossy from the bottom and dark green olive on top. It blooms in April and May. In June, mature fruiting heads with seeds wrapped in down emerge from the green catkins.

QUIZ

24. From wood of what tree was the Trojan horse built?

QUIZ

1. What flowers grew from the ground in the places where lightning sent by the thunderous Slavic god Perun struck?
2. What flower name is also a term for a man in love with himself?
3. From the twigs of what tree are baskets woven?
4. From the twigs of what bush simple flutes were made, while its stems were used to blow the fire?
5. Which plant is the last to bloom at the end of summer, providing pollen and nectar to wild bees?
6. A plant growing in naturally valuable, often wetland habitats, used since ancient times as a spice in cooking?
7. A tree symbolizing longevity and strength?
8. According to Jan Długosz, she was the goddess of wildlife, what plant is it?
9. What plant with edible flowers is threatened with extinction due to lack of sheep grazing?
10. What plant's flower buds contain the red sap used to dye threads?
11. Plants from which wreaths were woven and on which valuable species of butterflies feed?
12. From wood of which tree were spears, lances and arrows made in the past?

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13. The fruit of which shrub is a favourite food of fieldfares and Bohemian waxwings?
 14. What plant did Achilles use to treat the wounds of his soldiers during the Trojan War?
 15. What powdered plant was used as snuff?
 16. In wood of which tree Wit Stwosz (Veit Stoss) carved a beautiful altar in St. Mary's Church in Kraków?
 17. A synanthropic plant often found in cereals?
 18. Bush with pink-red fruits growing on the edge of forests?
 19. A plant whose leaves are used to prepare refreshing infusions with antiseptic properties and a very pleasant, cooling taste?
 20. Fruit of which plants is the delicacy for goldfinch?
 21. From the inflorescences of what tree is cough syrup made?
 22. From the bark of what tree can an effective antipyretic be prepared?
 23. What tree yields red fruits, which are used to make preparations for heart diseases?
 24. From wood of what tree was the Trojan horse built?



ANSWERS:

1. Iris
2. Narcissi
3. From White willow
4. From Elderberry
5. Common ivy
6. Wild garlic
7. Oak
8. Mullein
9. Stemless carline thistle
10. St John's wort
11. Field pansy
12. Common ash
13. Juniper
14. Yarrow
15. Oregano
16. In Small-leaved linden wood
17. Common poppy
18. Raspberry
19. From Corn mint
20. From thistle
21. Young pine shoots
22. Silver poplar
23. Hawthorn
24. From Fir

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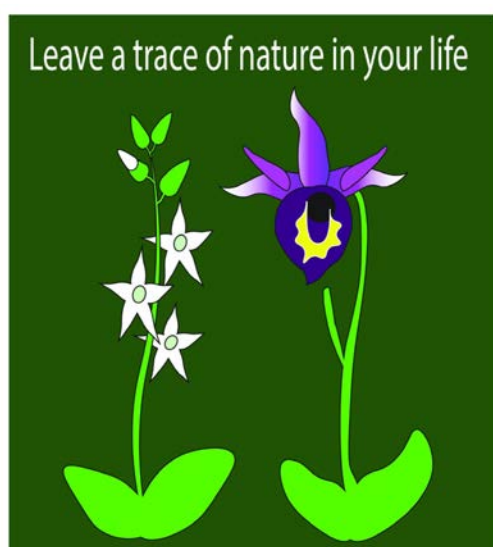
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