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Contributed by Lin Moeller

VIOLA—THE 2022 HERB of the YEAR



Since 1991, the International Herb Society has named a plant or herb of the year. For 2022, it is the Viola, a flowering plant of the Violaceae family and a native to the Northern Hemisphere. One well-known species, *Viola tricolor* L. has common names that are familiar to us, including wild pansy, Johnny Jump-up, and heartease. It has been a symbol of love, death and rebirth since Roman and Greek times where it was used to treat heart conditions, hence heartease.

'Pansy' comes from the French 'pensée,' meaning thinker. It originated in the 1700's court of Louis XV where a brilliant economist and surgeon, Francis Quesnay, worked and

was given by the king a coat of arms shield decorated with three pansy flowers.

In many areas, including its native Europe, *Viola tricolor* is considered 'a weed of cultivation.' It does well in sunny temperate areas or partial shade in warmer areas. Growing to 6 – 8 inches in height, it blooms from spring to fall and spreads in a rambling, creeping manner. Therefore, it should be planted where it can roam. Considered a hardy annual or short-lived perennial, it easily self-seeds with each flower producing numerous seeds, or its seeds can be sown directly into moist, drained soil in the spring or fall.

Violas have been used medicinally since the Middle Ages, especially the leaves in teas. The edible flowers contain antioxidants and are used in salad recipes and as dessert accents. The flowers have also been used to make dyes of yellow and purple. They are used as an ingredient in cures for epilepsy, skin irritations and respiratory ailments, such as coughs, whooping coughs and bronchitis.

Violas are the progenitor of our cultivated pansy and should not be confused with its cousin, the violet. A final interestingly fact: the flowers droop their heads in wet weather and at night.

