

## Commoner with a Regal Name

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Queen Anne's Lace is makes a nice showing along roadsides and in fields throughout the summer. There are many legends about the origin of its regal name. One of the most popular stories says that it is named for Anne, queen consort of James I ( King James Bible ) of England. The wildflower was one of her favorites, and she organized a contest for ladies of the court to produce a pattern of lace modeled after the blossom. She won the contest, but while working on the lace pattern, pricked her finger, leaving a tiny drop of blood , which became reddish purple "floret" in the center of the white flower cluster . Actually, at least one botanist maintains that the flower was named for St. Anne, mother of Mary, grandmother of Jesus, and patron saint of lace makers. The name "Queen Anne's Lace" did not actually appear in print until 1895, two hundred seventy-six years after Queen Anne's death!

Then there's also the Christian symbolism associated with the blossom, which says that red florets in the center represent the blood of Christ, surrounded by his followers ( white florets ) down through the ages.

Most herbals list Queen Anne's Lace tea for dissolving kidney stones, as well as a number of other medical applications. Most interesting, perhaps, is that a teaspoon of its seeds has been used in rural areas of the United States as a morning after pill! The earliest written reference to this use dates back to the fourth century BC. Research in the 1980's found evidence that ( in mice, at least! ) chemicals in seeds block production of progesterone, a key hormone of pregnancy.

This wildflower is thought to have originated in Afghanistan, from where it spread to Europe and then to America. It was already considered a nuisance weed in Connecticut by 1881. Another common name for Queen Anne's Lace is Wild Carrot, and indeed, it is the plant from which the domestic carrot was developed. Both have the scientific name *Daucus carota*, but only domesticated selected varieties produce a large orange, crisp, tasty root. Queen Anne's Lace has a large taproot, which has the carrot flavor but is tough, woody, and not too tasty. It can add flavor and some nutrition to a "wild edible stew"! *Daucus* is a Latin word for "carrot" which never caught on. Carota is from the Greek word for carrot, "karoton", so the redundant scientific name means literally "Carrot carrot"!

From 1789 until 1836 the carrot family was known as Umbelliferae, which refers to the botanical name for its floral structure, the umbel. This is a collection of many tiny flowers forming an umbrella like blossom. After opening the bloom becomes flat topped, and then as the seeds develop the whole thing turns inward forming a bird's nest-like structure, protecting seeds until they are ready to be dispersed by wind or animals. In1836 carrot family acquired the name Apiaceae from Latin for carrot's cousin celery. Apiaceae has been selected for primary listing in Weakley's Flora. Other well known family members are coriander, dill, fennel, parsley, parsnip, and caraway.

Queen Anne's Lace has inspired several poems, including this one by Mary Leslie Newton:

Queen Anne, Queen Anne, has washed her lace  
(She chose a summer's day)  
And hung it in a grassy place  
To whiten, if it may.

Queen Anne, Queen Anne, has left it there,

And slept the dewy night;  
Then waked, to find the sunshine fair,  
And all the meadows white.

Queen Anne, Queen Anne, is dead and gone  
(She died a summer's day),  
But left her lace to whiten in  
Each weed entangled way!

You can produce Queen Anne's Lace blossoms in all colors of the rainbow by soaking the stems in solutions of food coloring. After cutting stems in the field, cut them again under water, before placing in food color solution. It takes a couple of days. Give it a try.

And, Queen Anne's Lace flower heads, carefully pressed and dried, look like large snowflakes. You can spray them with white or colored paints and add some glitter, and ribbon to hang them on the Christmas tree, or use them to decorate handmade Christmas cards.

There's even a recipe for Queen Anne's Lace Jelly which you might like to try, at:  
<http://www.cooks.com/rec/view/0,1823,152174-246203,00.html>

If you are going to make Queen Anne's Lace jelly, you need to be absolutely sure that you can identify the plant because Queen Anne's Lace has some deadly poisonous close relatives that are look-alikes. These include poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) and water hemlock, (*Cicuta maculata*). Queen Anne's Lace smells carrot-like and has hairy stems, and poison hemlock has a very unpleasant smell and smooth stems with purple spots. Water hemlock also has purple or reddish streaks on the stem. Poison hemlock is probably the most poisonous plant naturalized in this country, and was used to produce the deadly potion that killed Socrates. These hemlocks are unrelated to our native mountain evergreen Hemlock, a member of the pine family.

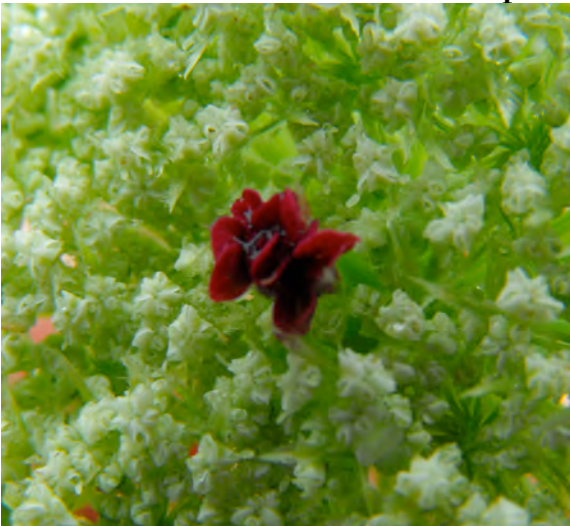
### Roadside colony of Wild Carrot, Abbeville County, May 13, 2012



**One umbel with no shortage of pollinators.**



**Central red florets are sterile with petals only.**



**Blossom in birds nest form with seeds maturing.**

