

MARSH MARIGOLD

By Shirley Froehlich, BSA

Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* is, to my mind, the Queen of Springtime. She lavishes her rich, golden yellow jewels all over the ponds, streams and bogs every year as the land awakens from its winter slumber. At a time of year when most other plants are only thinking about growing, the regal Marsh Marigold is in full bloom.

There is an excellent book by Jack Sanders called Hedgemaids and Fairycandles which has a chapter on Marsh Marigold. In it he lists many colourful names that this well known wildflower is also called. Some of them are Kings Cups, Water Blobs, May Blobs, Mollyblobs, Horseblobs, Bull's Eyes, Leopard's Foot, Marybuds, Water Dragon, Cow Lily, Soldier Buttons, Water Goggles, Gools, Drunkards and Water Crowfoot.

DESCRIPTION

Marsh Marigold has large, shiny leaves which are round or kidney shaped. It has smooth, hollow stems coming from coarse, fleshy roots. The plant grows 20-50 cm tall (8"-20"). It is usually 20-30 cm tall (8"-12") in full sun and grows up to 50 cm (20") when in part shade. The flowers actually have no petals. They have instead 5 - 9 bright yellow sepals. They are 2 - 4 cm across ($\frac{3}{4}$ " - 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "). In Manitoba Marsh Marigold is usually blooming on Mother's Day and continues until the end of May. Seed is produced in a dense head of many pods which are filled with many small seeds. The seed is ripe and ready to collect when the pods are opening, usually around the second week of June. Most seed will be green in colour and some will be starting to turn brown.

NATIVE HABITAT

This is one of the few wildflowers that has a huge native range. It is native to North America, Europe and Asia. Perhaps this accounts for the many colourful names that it has. In North America it grows from Labrador to Alaska and south to the Carolinas and Nebraska. It can be found in wet places such as streams, roadside ditches and the edges of lakes and ponds in the Parkland and Boreal Forest regions of the prairies.

CULTURE

Marsh Marigold can be grown in several locations in the home garden. It will grow in shallow water on a ledge in a pond. It will also grow in a boggy area of the yard that is wetter than normal. It does best where the soil is damp throughout the growing season, however it will tolerate sites that are only wet in spring. If the site dries out in summer the leaves disappear as the plant goes dormant to wait for spring. We created a bog at our place recently when we dismantled our children's play structure. It was in a bit of a low area to start with and after the sand was removed it was just right to stay wet longer than normal in spring and after summer rains, especially with heavy clay soil. The plant likes lots of sun however it will also grow in part shade.

Plants can be set out in the garden or pond after the danger of frost is past. If you wish to grow Marsh Marigold from seed the trays should be seeded right after seed collection. Do not cover the seed and keep the trays watered outdoors all summer. It germinates very well the following spring. The seedlings can be moved to larger pots in mid to late June, then planted out in the garden in late July or held until the following spring for planting out. It takes several years to get blooming plants from seed.

Are you one of those people lucky enough to have a pond? Or are you like the rest of us? Would like a pond but don't feel like digging that much. Then the answer is a bog. Or maybe you have always felt cursed with an overly wet garden or ditch that never dries out. If you fall into any of the above categories then Marsh Marigold is the plant for you. Companion plants that also thrive in boggy conditions include Northern Bog Violet, Saline Shooting Star, Swamp Milkweed and Wild Iris. Think of the excitement you can create when you tell your children or grandchildren or your friends that you have Bull's Eyes or Water Dragons lurking in your backyard.

Shirley is the owner of Prairie Originals, a nursery specialising in wildflowers and native prairie grasses near Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. www.prairieoriginals.com