



Vinca minor

Vinca minor (common names lesser periwinkle or dwarf periwinkle) is a species of flowering plant native to central and southern Europe, from Portugal and France north to the Netherlands and the Baltic States, east to the Caucasus, and also southwestern Asia in Turkey. Other vernacular names used in cultivation include small periwinkle, common periwinkle, and sometimes in the United States, myrtle or creeping myrtle.

Description

Vinca minor is a trailing, viny subshrub, spreading along the ground and rooting along the stems to form large clonal colonies and occasionally scrambling up to 40 centimetres (16 in) high but never twining or climbing. The leaves are evergreen, opposite, 2–4.5 centimetres (0.79–1.77 in) long and 1–2.5 centimetres (0.39–0.98 in) broad, glossy dark green with a leathery texture and an entire margin.

The flowers are solitary in the leaf axils and are produced mainly from early spring to mid-summer but with a few flowers still produced into the autumn; they are violet-purple (pale purple or white in some cultivated selections), 2–3 centimetres (0.79–1.18 in) diameter, with a five-lobed corolla. The fruit is a pair of follicles 2.5 centimetres (0.98 in) long, containing numerous seeds.

The closely related species *Vinca major* is similar, but larger in all parts, and also has relatively broader leaves with a hairy margin.

Cultivation

The species is commonly grown as a groundcover in temperate gardens for its evergreen foliage, spring and summer flowers, ease of culture, and dense habit that smothers most weeds. It was once commonly planted in cemeteries in parts of the American South and naturalized periwinkle may indicate the presence of graves whose other markers have disappeared.

The species has few pests or diseases outside its native range and is widely naturalised and classified as an invasive species in parts of North America. Invasion can be restricted by removal of rooting stems in spring.

Cultivars

There are numerous cultivars, with different flower colours and variegated foliage. Many have a less vigorous habit than the species, and are therefore more suitable for smaller gardens. The following cultivars have gained the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit:

- 'Argenteovariegata' (leaves have creamy white margins)
- 'Atropurpurea' (burgundy-purple flowers)
- 'Azurea Flore Pleno' (double blue flowers)
- 'La Grave' (violet flowers) This variety is also known as Bowles's Variety or Bowles's Blue in the trade.

Medicinal use: chemical constituents

Vinca minor contains more than 50 alkaloids.

Vinpocetine (brand names: Cavinton, Intelectol; chemical name: ethyl apovincamate) is a semisynthetic derivative alkaloid of vincamine.

Color

The color name periwinkle is derived from the flower.