



and now
if you want to learn more
about the flowers, trees
and other plants
from European countries
which the swallows used
to build their nest, you can read
the following pages





Greece: olive tree

In ancient times the olive tree was the symbol of the city of Athens. According to mythology, it was the goddess Athena who introduced the cultivation of the olive to Attica.

During king Kekrops' reign, Poseidon, god of the sea, and Athena, goddess of wisdom, both sought the role of protector of the newly-founded city; and so the gods of Olympus gathered at the foot of the Acropolis and agreed that whichever of the two contestants could offer the more useful gift would be appointed the new city's patron.

First Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and immediately a wave gushed out (or according to another version of the myth, a pure white war-horse). Next Athena struck the rock of the Acropolis

with her tall spear, and on that spot an olive tree took root. The gods decided that the olive tree was the gift more useful to mankind and so the city of king Kekrops received the name of Athens, after the divinity who would henceforth be its patron.

In honour of their goddess the Athenians built the finest temple of antiquity, the Parthenon, and celebrated her name in musical, athletic and equestrian contests, the Greater and Lesser Panathenaia. The prizes for the winners were amphorae, earthenware vessels filled with oil from the goddess's sacred tree, the olive.

From very ancient times the olive tree has also been a symbol of peace and friendship, of reconciliation and of fame. In times of war, the heralds who went into the

enemy camp to seek a temporary truce for the burial of the dead would hold an olive branch before them. At the Olympic Games, victors were crowned with a wreath woven from the branches of the sacred wild olive tree which grew within the precinct at Olympia.

This wreath is also the symbol of the Olympic Games of 2004 which will take place in Athens, marking the return of the first Games of the new millenium to the land that gave them birth and to the city where, in 1896, the Olympic Idea was brought to life again.

With its simple, plain and rounded shape, the wreath of the wild olive symbolizes the oneness of the world, the historical continuity between the past and present and the hope for a peaceful future.





Austria: edelweiss

The edelweiss is a small white flower which grows on steep rock faces high up in the Austrian Alps. Its name is formed from the German words for 'noble' (edel) and 'white' (weiss).

Even were such a thing permissible, it would be extremely difficult for an ordinary person to pick one of these flowers, since only experienced climbers could safely reach the precipitous places where edelweiss is found.

Many tales of love and fearful tragedies surround this little flower. According to an old Alpine tradition, a young man who wished to win his bride had to climb the

rocky pinnacles where it is found and bring one back to his beloved as proof that his love was pure and he was worthy of her. As the edelweiss has become an endangered species, a number of them have been replanted in the mountains of New Zealand, where they can grow in a protected environment.

To emphasize the need to preserve the habitat of the high mountain ranges, the Austrians decided that their Euro coins should depict two famous flowers from the Alps: The rare gentian is featured on the one-euro coin and the edelweiss on the two-euro denomination.



Belgium: golden iris

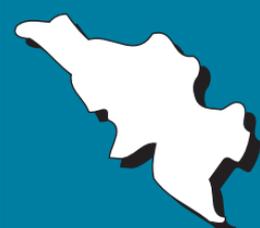
Long before Brussels developed into the great modern city and home of European institutions that it is today, it was just a small town built on the marshy land surrounding the river Senne and its slow-flowing tributaries.

Legend has it that when foreign enemies threatened to attack the town the soldiers of the Duke of Brabant inflicted a crushing defeat on them, and all because of a wild water-plant, the golden iris also known as yellow flag.

The duke's men knew that although this member of the iris family grows in marshes, it will only flourish in shallow water with solid ground beneath, and because of this they were able to hoodwink their adversaries. They launched a charge across the

watery swamp which spread out round the town, quite safe because they were galloping across the stretches where the tall yellow flowers grew thickest. Seeing the ease with which the Duke of Brabant's cavalry had crossed the treacherous obstacle, the enemy were tricked into advancing on the town; but as they did not understand the message of the flags they were unable to distinguish the shallow parts from deeper water, and bogged down in the mud.

Because of its beauty and its close association with the city's birth and growth, the golden iris still holds a very special place in the hearts of the inhabitants of Brussels. It features on the flags of both the province of Brabant and the city, whose official emblem it is.





Cyprus: cedar tree

The impressive Cyprus cedar grows to a great height and can live for many centuries. Found nowhere else but on this island, it is a characteristic feature of the mountain uplands and is woven into the history, legends and traditions of the Cypriot people.

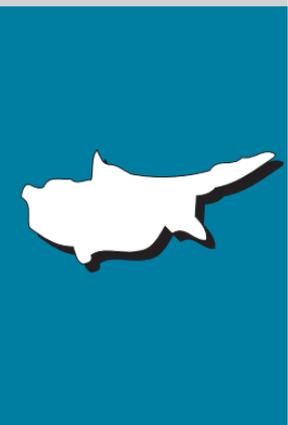
The tree is also called 'the Virgin's pine' because, according to a local tale, when she visited the monastery of Kykkos, the pine trees on her route bowed reverently at her passing, and in her gratitude the Virgin transformed them into the lovely cedars which we see today.

References to this endemic tree go back even further than the time of Christ. Both Theophrastus and Pliny remarked on its great value. Its hard-grained, aromatic

wood provided excellent timber for building ships and furniture, and it was suitable for carving. In many old churches on Cyprus one can still admire intricately worked wooden icons, finely chiselled door and window frames and pulpits, all made from cedarwood.

Although the Cyprus cedar is no longer commercially exploited, it has succeeded in arousing the interest of mountain walkers, scientists and the authorities. It has been declared a protected species, and in the areas where it flourishes all cutting is now forbidden.

With the help of the island's people, the government is now taking all the necessary steps to preserve and encourage the spread of this unique Mediterranean tree.

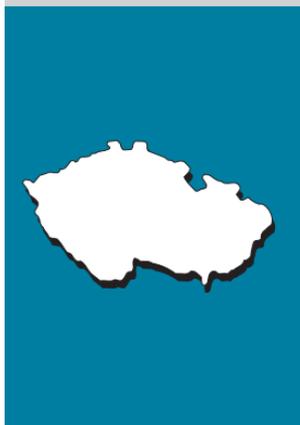


Czech Republic: dog rose

One of the loveliest and best-loved wild flowers to be found in the Czech countryside is the dog rose, which splashes the hedges and forest margins with its shades of pink in the long midsummer days. One of a dozen closely related species of wild rose, all loosely grouped under the same name, it can reach a height of three metres and its flowers and leaves are protected by ferocious curving thorns. In June and July its simple five-petalled flowers with their yellow stamens cover the bushes in a mass of bloom that may range from deep flushed pink to

white. And as the petals fall its scarlet rose-hips start to form, a rich source of vitamin C which villagers have used in making syrups and preserves since medieval times. Czech boys have long since found a far more entertaining use for them: the scratchy seeds inside the rose-hips, when dried and pulverized, make an effective natural itching powder!

The wood of the tough stems, with its complex swirling grain, was once much valued for its use in marquetry, while its roots and main shoot were formerly used for the grafting on of cultivated species.





Denmark: beech tree

One of the Danish people's favourite trees is the beech, the 'mother of the forest' as it is called by many experts in the field, since it is not only among the largest but also one of the most ancient of all trees.

Some twenty-five percent of Denmark's woodlands consists of oak trees mixed with beech, and the proportion is steadily rising. Straight-grained and easily worked, beechwood has contributed largely to the worldwide success of the Danish furniture industry, a major exports earner.

The beech tree is an integral part of the

peace and beauty of the Danish countryside and of the gracious and serene character of the country as a whole, with its wealth of traditions and long history. Indeed, the first verse of Denmark's national anthem, 'Der er et yndigt land' (There is a Lovely Land), makes specific reference to the place of honour the beech tree holds throughout the country and in its people's hearts.

The fairytale beauty of the Danish landscape, with its towering stands of beeches, has a dreamlike quality which impresses itself indelibly upon the visitor's soul.



Estonia: cornflower

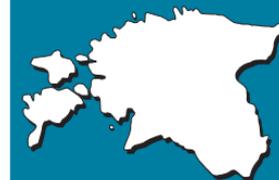
The luminous blue cornflower is one of Europe's loveliest wild flowers, though in the old days farmers considered it an enemy as it flourished in fields sown with corn and competed with the crop for nourishment. It was also disliked because at harvest-time its hard, hairy stalk would snag the harvesters' sickle blades, winning for the little flower the name of 'hurtsickle'.

The cornflower's scientific name, *centaurea cyanus*, is a reference to the centaur Cheiron, who taught mankind the healing powers of plants, and the apothecaries of old believed that an infusion of the cornflower's petals had stimulative properties, strengthened the eyesight and, in conjunction with various other herbs,

made an effective antidote to scorpion stings and other poisons. The flower's petals were also ground and used as an ingredient for painters' colours and even in cookery.

The flower has grown on Estonian soil for ten thousand years and more, since men first settled in northern Europe.

Because it is found in fields of corn it has come to be associated with bread and the Estonians' daily struggle for survival. Its radiant blooms are a favourite subject for local artists and are a frequently-encountered theme in the country's decorative arts. It is therefore not surprising that when the people of Estonia were asked to choose a national flower, they picked the humble cornflower.





Finland: birch tree

Several years ago, when the Finns were called to the polls to vote for a national tree, they decided that it was the birch which best represented the natural wealth, the history and traditions of their land. For the people of Finland the birch tree has always played an important role in daily life, as well as in the country's economy.

One fifth of Finland's forests are composed of birch trees, whose wood is used as a raw material in industry; and even today some houses are still heated by wood-stoves fed with birch logs, not to mention the saunas which are the distin-

guishing feature of Finnish holiday homes. By the nineteenth century, the birch tree had come to play such a prominent role in people's lives that it achieved a place of honour in the nation's literature. In Zacharias Topelius' tale 'Koivu ja tähti' (The Birch Tree and the Star), two children who are lost are only able to find their home again when they recognize the birch tree which stands in its front yard.

It is also worth mentioning that the most popular postcard on sale in modern Finland features a girl in traditional costume leaning against a birch tree with a smile upon her face.



France: vine

France is one of the most important wine-producing countries in the world, offering an astonishing range of types, varieties and qualities. Cultivation of the vine began in France as early as the sixth century BC.

According to most historians, the first vinticulturists were the Greek colonists who had established themselves on the country's southern shores, and their vineyards were kept up and extended by the Romans, who were particularly fond of wine. By the fourth century AD, cultivation of the grape had spread as far as Bordeaux, Champagne and Burgundy, and as the years went by and the French acquired a growing taste for wine, the vineyards reached out ever further.

In a country producing so much wine, it is not surprising that many traditions and legends have grown up around the cultivation of the vine in France.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the French and the English fought for control of the area around Bordeaux and the vineyards which produced such splendid wines. In modern times, vineyards may no longer be a cause for war, but they still provide the French with an opportunity to celebrate an old custom.

In accordance with tradition, each year, on the Thursday of the third week in November, the people of Paris welcome the new season's Beaujolais to their city and have the privilege of being the first people in the world to taste it.





Germany: oak tree

The perennial oak tree is symbolic of the German woods and of her industrious people's strength and energy. Oak forests are the favourite setting for the fairy stories of the brothers Grimm and for legends such as the 'Song of the Nibelung', written in Old High German around the year 1200.

In the pre-Christian era, the oak was the sacred tree of the pagan German tribes. They were consecrated to the god of thunder, Donar, and the faithful flocked to lay gifts and sacrifices at their roots. The story has it that around 725 AD Saint Boniface decided to end these idolatrous practices by attempting to cut down a huge old oak tree formerly known as 'Donar's Oak'.

Lent strength by the power of his faith he achieved this awesome task, and by doing so converted the Germans to the Christian faith. Where the mighty oak had stood he built a church and planted a fir tree which he dedicated to the Christ-child.

Many centuries later, Martin Luther would re-establish the tradition of the Christmas tree, which has since spread across the globe.

In honour of their favourite tree the Germans decided that their smaller euro coins should feature sprays of oak leaves, thus giving a sense of stability and continuity to this restructuring of Europe's currencies.



Holland: tulip

No other flower has so captured the imagination and the hearts of men, or aroused such violent passions, as the tulip. Endemic to Persia, it was already being extensively cultivated by the 15th century. The flower received the name 'tulp' on account of its resemblance to the 'tullband' or turban, since it was from Constantinople that the first tulip bulbs reached Holland by sea, in 1562. However, supplies were limited and by the end of the century such was the demand that only the very wealthy could afford to buy them. By 1620, trade in tulip bulbs had passed into the hands of specialized merchants,

and the so-called 'tulip mania' followed. So eager were collectors to lay their hands on rare varieties that tulip bulbs became a precious commodity traded on the stock exchange in Amsterdam. The bulbs commanding the highest price were those afflicted by a mysterious viral infection producing flame or feather markings on the flower's petals.

However, in 1637 the tulip market crashed, plunging the country into economic ruin. Although tulip mania wiped out many a family fortune, the tulip has continued down the centuries to play a major role in Holland's flower industry and in its people's hearts.





Hungary: geranium

Though the window-boxes and the gardens of Hungary's picturesque villages are a riot of colour from late spring through to early autumn, the now ubiquitous flowers which people call geraniums are relative newcomers to this central-European country. Although the true geranium, with its five petals of equal size and shape, has been known in Europe since antiquity, and was given its name of 'geranos', or 'crane', by the ancient Greek physician Dioscorides, the potted gerani-

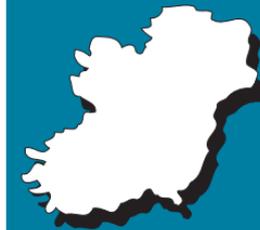
ums which grace the windowsills of the towns along the Danube and the villages of the Great Plain are, strictly speaking, pelargoniums. And the first specimens of these did not reach Europe until the beginning of the seventeenth century, sent from their native southern Africa as a gift to Holland by the Governor of Cape Colony in 1609. Recent arrival though the bright and hardy geranium may be, it is a fitting national flower for the cheerful, vivid and resilient Hungarians.



Ireland: shamrock

Every year, on the seventeenth of March, the Irish celebrate in honour of their patron saint, Naomh Padraig. Better known as St Patrick, he is the protector of Irish people the world over. Legend has it that when, in the mid fifth century, the saint was trying to convert the heathen Irish, he had difficulty in making the meaning of the Trinity clear to them – until he had a brilliant idea. He picked and held up one of the shamrocks which are so abundant in Ireland and compared its

three-lobed leaf to the triple but indivisible nature of the Almighty. The Irish immediately grasped his meaning and even adopted the little plant as their national symbol. And so it is that on every St Patrick's Day the people of Ireland wear the shamrock in their buttonholes and gather in pubs or in friends' homes to celebrate. On this day, too, thousands of people from every corner of the globe flock to the streets of Dublin and the country's other cities to follow the famous St Patrick's Day parades.





Italy: laurel

In the days of the Roman Empire, the laurel was the symbol of strength, authority, glory, distinction and supremacy. According to an ancient myth, Romulus, first king of Rome, and his brother Remus were abandoned on the river Tiber and came to rest beneath a laurel bush where they were found and suckled by a she-wolf. Another myth relates how Ares, god of war and protector of the city Alba Longa, appeared to the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia in a dream to prepare her for the arrival of the twin sons she would later bear. For seven whole nights she saw herself in a garden, crowned with a laurel wreath and watching two saplings as they transformed themselves into

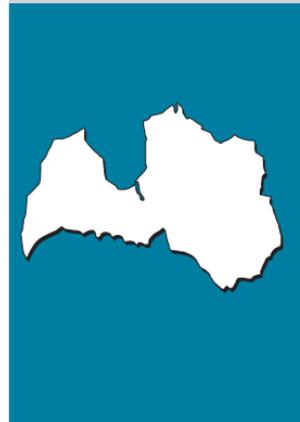
majestic trees. A few months later, Rhea Silvia gave birth to Romulus and Remus. Initially, laurels were worn only by military commanders in ceremonies to celebrate their victories. Crowned with a laurel wreath, the triumphant general would parade in his chariot from the Field of Mars to the temple of Capitoline Zeus, where he would make sacrifices and offer his victor's laurels to the god. Later, however, emperors too wore laurel wreaths in place of crowns. In ancient Rome, laurel was also used for medicinal purposes, as a seasoning and to make decorative garlands during the Saturnalia, the festival in honour of the god Saturn.



Latvia: daisy

The daisy is one of the oldest flowers on earth. Used as a motif in Minoan jewellery and Egyptian ceramics, it was also known to the ancient Assyrians for its many health-restoring powers. We meet the daisy, too, in a host of myths and traditions. In one old Celtic story, for example, the ghosts of children who die at birth scatter daisies on the earth to console their grieving parents. The myriads of humble daisies which carpet the fields of this little Baltic state from June until September are one of the country's most enchanting sights and make it clear why Latvians regard the daisy as

their national flower. It represents the innocence of true love and is celebrated in many traditional songs that also sing the praises of Latvia's two national trees, the linden and the oak, which symbolize the female and the male sexes. These trees were considered holy and were adored as deities. Love and respect are still accorded them today. No one would dream of cutting down a lime tree or an oak, even if it stands inconveniently in the middle of a cultivated field. Instead they are left untouched to grow proud and tall with the passing of the years.





Lithuania: rue

The shrubby, bitter-smelling rue, with its fleshy pinnate leaves and yellowish-green flowers is a plant which is distinctively Lithuanian, flourishing as it does on the heathlands of this Baltic state.

Its flowers, which symbolize beauty, grace and freshness, are much loved and have won an enviable place in the traditions of the country.

In the myths and legends of Lithuania, rue stands for female delicacy, innocence and grace - in contrast to the oak, which usually symbolizes the male nature.

Rue is a long-lived plant and in olden times young girls would plant it in the gardens of their houses. When they grew up and their wedding day eventually arrived, the rue would still be there for them to pick its flowering shoots and weave them into chaplets. This wedding custom is still preserved today in many parts of Lithuania.

The flowers of rue, 'the herb of grace' as Shakespeare called it, are among the most popular themes of traditional Lithuanian songs, which praise their elegant simplicity.



Luxembourg: oak tree

When, in the early summer of 1841, Wilhelm II, king of the Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg, paid a first visit to his neighbouring duchy, he expressed a wish to honour it by setting up an order: the Royal Grand-ducal Order of the Oaken Crown.

The inspiration for the title came from an oak tree which stood before the palace which the monarch and grand duke had chosen as his temporary residence.

Members of the Royal Grand-ducal Order of the Oaken Crown, founded in December of that year, were appointed in four class-

es and in accordance with its founding charter its Grand Commander was King Wilhelm himself. The colours chosen for the order's insignia were orange, yellow and dark green, the last of these symbolizing the oak which is the dominant tree in the forests of the duchy.

The choice of these three colours may be due to the deep impression made on the Dutch monarch and grand duke by the beauty of the Ardennes landscape with its noble forests crowned by lordly oaks, its lovely wild flowers and its golden fields of corn.





Malta: araar tree

The araar, also known as African juniper or sandarac, has been the national tree of Malta since 1992. A rare species of evergreen cypress with an aromatic reddish-brown trunk, it grows in rocky habitats and can reach a height of around five metres.

Though still fairly frequently seen in northern Africa, particularly in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, Europe's climatic conditions do not favour its growth and it is only to be found in the north part of Malta and in a small area around the southern Spanish city of Cartagena. Its name is of Arabic origin.

Much loved by the Maltese, this bright

green tree with its distinctive cones has given its name to many places on the islands.

The Romans valued the araar for the exceptional quality of its timber and used it as a construction material. Its resin, known as 'sandarac' was considered to be an aid to dental hygiene and was often used in place of toothpaste. Today it is still employed in the manufacturing process for microscope lenses.

Barely a hundred trees survive in Malta today, and since 1993 it has been protected by the islands' laws and included in the official catalogue of the world's endangered species.

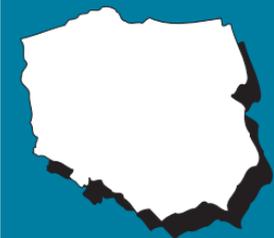


Poland: poppy

One of the Polish people's favourite flowers is the field poppy which brightens the roadsides and the meadows with its splendid scarlet blooms as late spring burgeons into summer. Various myths and legends centre round the poppy. Known since antiquity for its soothing powers, it is said to have been created by the goddess Demeter to console herself for the loss of her beloved daughter Persephone. During the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century, its blood-red colour and its frequent presence on the open ground of battlefields caused it to become associated with soldiers killed in battle. In

the decades which followed, this association strengthened, until today the poppy is established the world over as the symbol of the fallen warrior. And so the wheel has come full circle: for in the dramas of the ancient Greeks, Sleep and his twin brother Death are always represented crowned with poppies or holding bunches of them in their hands.

For the Poles, with their sad and troubled history, the poppy is an especially poignant symbol, representing as it does the blood of their brave compatriots shed heroically in the country's many struggles for freedom, honour and independence.





Portugal: pine tree

According to popular tradition, Portugal's King Diniz 'the Farmer' decided in the early fourteenth century to plant a barrier consisting of thousands of pine trees along the coastline west of the town of Leiria. His aim was to protect the local farmers' fields from the fierce Atlantic winds which lifted sand from the beaches and regularly threatened crops. In the following century, Prince Henry the Navigator encouraged and financed the first long ocean voyages of exploration, to the islands of Madeira and the western coast of Africa; and it was from the now

splendid pine forest of Leiria that he ordered the timber to be cut to build the famous Portuguese caravels in which the explorers would set out on their great voyages of discovery. However, the prince had been careful to cut only what was strictly necessary. The pine forest survived and flourished and in recent years has been included in Portugal's 'patrimonio ecologico' or natural heritage, a unique treasure of historical and cultural significance to be handed down for future generations to cherish and enjoy.



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Slovakia: lime tree

According to Greek mythology, when Cronus became enamoured of the nymph Philyra, his furious wife Rhea transformed him into a horse, then turned his beloved into a lime tree. And that explains why the son born of their union, Cheiron, was a centaur. Just as the lime tree is known for its healing powers, so Cheiron the centaur was given knowledge of the plants which would cure the sicknesses mankind was afflicted with. When he met his end on earth, struck by an arrow, the gods refused to let him die but transposed him to the heavens, where he can still be seen in the shape of the familiar constellation Sagittarius. The lime tree is the symbol of the Slavonic

races who settled in central Europe in very ancient times, and it is still a favourite with the people of today's Slovakia. Because of its medicinal qualities it was called the 'tree of life', and linden branches often flank the coats of arms of central Europe's titled families, as a sign of their nobility. The impressive lime, with its enormous heart-shaped leaves, was also connected to the worship of the Virgin Mary, and can often be found within the precincts of monasteries and cathedrals. For the Slovaks, it represents the history and traditions of their country, a perpetual reminder of a common Slavonic heritage and of the need for solidarity.



EURŌPA





Slovenia: carnation

The scientific name for the carnation, which was first given by the ancient Greek botanist Theophrastus, is 'dianthus', meaning 'flower of Zeus'. Numerous myths and traditions surround this flower, one being that on the spots where Mary's tears fell as she watched Christ carrying the cross, carnations grew and flowered. In 1907 the pink carnation came to represent motherly love throughout the western world, when it was chosen to be the symbol of Mother's Day.

In Slovenia, the red carnation was already a favourite decorative motif by the fifteenth century, and it continued to be used in later times as a theme in woodcarving and

woven handicrafts. Today one sees it beautifying the windowsills and balconies of Slovenian town houses and filling village gardens with its colour. It is embroidered onto headscarves, dresses and girls' bonnets, carved on furniture, and even decorates babies' cradles, together with the icon of the Virgin Mary.

The carnation is also celebrated in song as the flower girls wore upon their breast and pinned to their lovers' chests when they were called into the army. It thus seems very natural that in the nineteenth century, influenced by the Romantic movement, the Slovenians chose the carnation as their national flower.



Spain: orange tree

In 1982, Spain hosted one of the most successful and spectacular Mundials in the history of football. It will long be remembered not only for being so successfully organized, and for the splendid performances of so many of the players, but because it was the first time in the history of this world event that the official mascot was not a cuddly animal or a human character – but an orange! This highly original mascot was called 'Naranjito' or 'Little Orange' and his disarming smile immediately won the hearts

not only of football fans but ordinary people the world over.

Oranges are among Spain's best-known agricultural exports to the world and are cultivated mainly in the Mediterranean seacoast provinces of Murcia and Valencia, the 'Queen of Oranges' and one of the most fertile regions in the whole of Europe. Valencia's endless dark-leaved groves of equally-spaced trees, their branches sagging with their heavy load of glowing fruit, are a sight to impress and delight the eyes of winter visitors.





Sweden: blue anemone

One of Sweden's loveliest and most popular children's songs is the ballad of the blue anemone. All Swedish children learn its verses at their mother's knee and love to sing them. This song is a cultural treasure shared by all, associated with moments of family tranquillity and happiness; and for the older generation it brings back memories of the carefree days of childhood. The humble little blue anemone is the harbinger of spring, and as the days grow longer boys and girls come out of their houses to play in the slowly greening countryside. They pick the early flowers to weave garlands, rejoicing in the blossoming of nature; and as they play, they celebrate the coming spring's abundance by gaily singing the song of the blue anemone, which might be freely rendered thus:

*The anemones come into flower
And turn each glade into a bower.
Lifting their heads, they raise sweet voices:
'Spring has come and nature rejoices!
The children spend endless happy hours
Gathering the fragrant pale blue flowers,
And tired out at the end of the day
They homeward wend their weary way.
'Mother, the spring has come at last!
Oh, joy! Oh, joy! The winter's past!
Now we can clamber over the rocks
Without even wearing shoes and socks,
Like the fair anemones, marching in blue
Over hill and dale with never a shoe.'*

*'But remember,' their smiling mothers reply,
'It's too early yet the cold to defy.
You are not the same as anemones,
Who have never been known to cough or sneeze!
If you go running barefoot and bold
You'll very soon come down with a cold.
Don't be deceived by this carpet of blue;
It's a long while yet till winter is through!'*



United Kingdom - England: rose

The rose, 'king of the flowers', is the symbol of the English royal dynasty and is linked with a troubled period in the long history of Britain. For thirty years, in the second half of the fifteenth century, the houses of York and Lancaster were in violent conflict over the crown. As the badge of the house of York was a white rose and that of the house of Lancaster a red one, historians have named this long but sporadic struggle for the English throne the Wars of the Roses. It ended on the field of Bosworth, on 22 August 1485, when

Henry Tudor defeated Richard III and the fallen monarch's golden chaplet was picked up from the battlefield and placed upon the victor's brow. Henry's decision to marry the young Elizabeth of York succeeded in uniting the two houses and ensured for England stability and peace for many years to come. Thanks to this union, the white rose and the red had now become the Tudor rose, and a new dynasty was born, the Tudors, the last of whose line, Elizabeth I, established England as a great world power.

*'...that which we call a rose
by any other name would smell as sweet'
(Romeo and Juliet, Act II, scene II) '*





United Kingdom - Scotland: thistle

More than a thousand years ago, when Viking plunderers made frequent raids on Scotland, a band of Scottish warriors had set up camp for the night in a field, unaware that the Vikings had been following and were ready to attack.

As the Vikings silently approached, sure of the outcome of the charge they planned to launch, something unexpected happened which saved their adversaries' lives. Creeping up barefoot in the dark, the attackers stumbled into a patch of prickly thistles and let out yelps of pain. Woken

by their cries, the Scots put up a brave resistance and succeeded in beating off the Vikings. Tradition has it that from that night onwards the humble thistle 'the well-armed and valiant knight of the flower kingdom' became the symbol of Scotland's formidable powers of self-defence.

Indeed, Scotland's oldest knightly order, dedicated to the country's patron saint, St Andrew, is called 'The Order of the Thistle'. The order's motto: 'Nemo me impune lacessit' is, in its vernacular rendering of 'Wha daur meddle wi'me?' still one of Scotland's best-known sayings.



EORPA

United Kingdom - Wales: daffodil

The Welsh number the daffodil among their favourite flowers. Around the first of March, feast day of their patron saint, St David, these harbingers of spring are in their glory in the countryside and villages of Wales. Another reason for the special place the daffodil holds in the people's hearts is that, together with the leek, it is the emblem of the Principality.

Most historians agree that the Welsh wore the leek pinned to their caps in battle, to distinguish their compatriots from the enemy and thus suffer fewer unnecessary losses. According to one version, it was

St David himself who urged his Celtic countrymen to wear the leek, on the eve of a battle with the Saxons.

The tradition has continued into modern times, as on St David's Day it is still the custom for the men and women of Wales to hold a daffodil and wear the leek while soldiers ceremonially eat one raw, to honour their patron and protector.

The fact that the daffodil is also a Welsh emblem may be due to the fact that the names for leek and daffodil are similar in Welsh (cenhinen = leek, cenhinen pedr = daffodil).



EWROP



The 'spring' fresco

This fresco, brought to light by archaeologists during excavations on the island of Santorini, is a unique artistic discovery.

Almost four thousand years ago, in a paean of praise to life and nature, its unknown creator depicted the rocky landscape of the island, clothed in clumps of flowering lilies, with swallows fluttering in the sky above.

The 'Thera Fresco', as it is known from the island's ancient name, was the inspiration for the logo of the Greek presidency of the European Union. The swallow, harbinger of spring, symbolizes rebirth, hope, the dawning of a new era, and confidence in the shared future of the countries of the European community.





The myth of Europa

According to Greek mythology, Europa was the lovely daughter of Agenor, king of Tyre. One morning, as she was playing on the seashore with her friends, a handsome white bull appeared before them. While the other maidens looked on in admiration, Europa stroked its flanks and crowned it with a garland of wild flowers. Then the great creature knelt before her and showed by signs that it wanted her to mount upon its back. Europa had no sooner done so than the white bull, who was really the god Zeus transformed, plunged headlong into the waves and took her far away upon his back, ignoring all her tears and pleading. When they reached a great island to the west, he hid her in a cave. Minos, king of Crete, was one of the three sons born of their union.

Many believe it was from this princess that Europe got its name, either because from Crete Zeus took her to the mainland, or because her keen, wide-ranging gaze embraced the whole of Europe lying to the north, or even because the goddess Aphrodite gave the continent the princess's name to console her for the loved ones she had left behind in Asia.

Others maintain that the origin of Europe's name will never be known.





PHOTO: V. VRETTOS

The writer

Eugene Trivizas was awarded an LL.B and a B.Sc. degree in Politics and Economics by the University of Athens. He went on to receive an LL.M. degree in Criminal Law from the University of London and a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. He is now a barrister-at-law and a visiting professor of comparative criminology at the University of Reading in England. As an author he has published more than one hundred books, all of them currently in print. He has also written twenty theatrical works, one opera libretto and many popular TV serials.

His turns of phrase and neologisms have entered the Greek language and the comic characters created by him have become part of children's culture. His books have been translated into fifteen languages, including Welsh, Japanese and Chinese. His book 'The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig' has been included in the Heinemann collection of the ten best picture-book classics ever published, has reached second place in the American picture books best-seller list and has won numerous international awards and distinctions.

Among the foreign editions of his books to be published this year are 'The Last Black Cat', translated by Nicola Crocetti (Editore Crocetti, Italy), 'The Snowman and the Girl', translated by Gilles Decorvet (éditions du Jasmin, France) and a pop-up edition of 'The Three Little Wolves' (Egmont Books, United Kingdom).

His Olympic novel 'Despina and the Dove' can be found in German, English and French on the website of the Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, Athens 2004 (www.olympiceducation.gr).

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Wherever you are...



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