

Intriguing World of Weeds ---

Oxeye Daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* L.), the White-Flowered Gold Flower¹

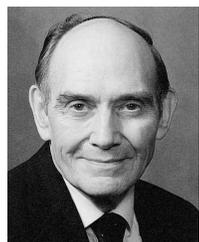
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The flower, with its white rays and golden disc, has small resemblance to an ox's eye, but at dusk it shines out from the mowinggrass like a fallen moon

Marcus Woodward, English naturalist, *Country Contentments*, 1925)

INTRODUCTION AND ETYMOLOGY

Oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* L.), a European perennial, was brought to North America as an ornamental. The plant is still grown in decorative gardens and it is one parent of 'Shasta' daisy (Holm et al.



1997). Tradition says that the oxeye daisy crept out of Massachusetts Governor Endicott's garden between Tuesdays, and claimed the whole nation in two centuries (Houghton 1978). It also arrived as a contaminant in imported hay and grain seeds (Houghton 1978). Oxeye daisy escaped cultivation and

also spread quite readily from agricultural activities to become an aggressive competitor. It often forms thick patches, especially in cattle-grazed areas, reducing hay or forage production (Olson and Wallander 1999). Consequently, oxeye daisy has been declared a noxious weed in many areas (Holm et al. 1997). It is found throughout most of the United States and north into southern Canada from Labrador to British Columbia (USDA 1970).

Chrysanthemum is a member of the Asteraceae (Compositae), Aster Family, one of the largest families of flowering plants, with about 1,100 currently accepted genera and 25,000 species (Heywood 1993). Some 18 species of annual herbs comprise the genus *Chrysanthemum*, with flowers in daisy-like heads that bear distinct rays. These annuals should not be confused with the perennial chrysanthemums (chiefly *C. × morifolium* Ramat.) of gardens and florist shops, which are mostly native to China and Japan and include some of the most

popular and useful garden plants (Clark 1981; Hyam and Pankhurst 1995; Sanders 1993).

The scientific name, *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*, literally translates as "golden flower, white flower." The generic name *Chrysanthemum* is derived from the Greek *chrysos*, meaning gold, and *anthos*, meaning flower. The plant's specific name of *leucanthemum* simply means white and is derived from the Greek word *leuc* meaning white. The type species for the genus is an all-yellow flower, which explains the generic name. The deep-yellow center disc is composed of hundreds of tiny fertile yellow florets, while the 20 to 30 white rays or "petals" are sterile flowers. Sanders (1993) considers *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* to be one of the most mellifluous names that botanists have devised.

The name oxeye daisy first appeared in written English in 1688 when Randle Holme wrote in *The Academy of Armory*, "Oxe-eye a wild daisie of white." In 1706, Edward Phillips had this notation in *The New World of Words*: "Ox-eye . . . also an herb otherwise called Great Margaret, good for Wounds and the King's Evil." Ephraim Chambers in his *Cyclopaedia Supplement* stated, "Ox-eye daisy, a name sometimes given to the *Leucanthemum* of botanical writers" (Simpson and Weiner 1989).

About 18 species of *Chrysanthemum* are found in North America, including feverfew [*C. parthenium* (L.) Bernh.]. The oxeye daisy is by far the most widespread member (Sanders 1993). Few are native. Probably the only native North American *Chrysanthemum* species are found at or near the Arctic Circle (le Strange 1977).

Oxeye daisy was introduced into the northwestern United States in the late 1800s. By 1937, it had spread to over half the counties in the region. Its dissemination was primarily as a contaminant of forage grass and legume seeds (Forcella 1985).

Other common names for oxeye daisy include bull daisy, butter daisy, button daisy, dog daisy, dun daisy, field daisy, goldens, great oxeye, herb Margaret, horse daisy, horse gowan, marguerite, midsummer daisy, moon flower, moon penny, poorland daisy, white daisy, and whiteweed (Georgia 1942; le Strange 1977; Sanders 1993).

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