

Ambient Flowers

Amaranth

The **amaranths** (also called **pigweeds**) comprise the genus *Amaranthus*, a widely distributed genus of short-lived herbs, occurring mostly in temperate and tropical regions. Although there remains some confusion over the detailed taxonomy, there are about 60 *Amaranthus* species. Several of them are cultivated as leaf vegetables, cereals, or ornamental plants.

Members of this genus share many characteristics and uses with members of the closely related genus *Celosia*.

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Cultivation and uses

Several species are raised for **amaranth grain** in Asia and the Americas. Amaranth grain is a crop of moderate importance in the Himalaya. It was one of the staple foodstuffs of the Incas, and it is known as **kiwicha** in the Andes today. It was also used by the ancient Aztecs, who called it **huautli**, and other Amerindian peoples in Mexico to prepare ritual drinks and foods. To this day, amaranth grains are toasted much like popcorn and mixed with honey or molasses to make a treat called *alegría* (literally "joy") in Mexican Spanish.

Amaranth was used in several Aztec ceremonies, where images of their gods (notably Huitzilopochtli) were made with amaranth mixed with honey. The images were cut to be eaten by the people. This looked like the Christian communion to the Catholic priests, so the cultivation of the grain was forbidden for centuries.

Because of its importance as a symbol of indigenous culture, and because it is very palatable, easy to cook, and its protein particularly well suited to human nutritional needs, interest in grain amaranth (especially *A. cruentis* and *A. hypochondriaca*) was revived in the 1970s. It was recovered in Mexico from wild varieties is now commercially cultivated. It is a popular snack sold on almost every block of Mexico City, sometimes mixed with chocolate or puffed rice, and its use has spread to Europe and North America. Besides protein, amaranth grain provides a good source of dietary fiber and dietary minerals such as iron, magnesium, phosphorus, copper, and especially manganese.

Amaranth greens, also called **Chinese spinach**, **hinn choy** or **yin tsoi** (Chinese: 苋菜; Pinyin: xiàncài), **callaloo**, **tampala**, or **quelite**, are a common leaf vegetable throughout the tropics and in many warm temperate regions. They are a very good source of vitamins including vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin C, riboflavin, and folate, and dietary

<i>Amaranthus</i> ?

<i>Amaranthus tricolor</i> (Joseph's-coat)
Scientific classification
Kingdom: Plantae
Division: Magnoliophyta
Class: Magnoliopsida
Order: Caryophyllales
Family: Amaranthaceae
Genus: <i>Amaranthus</i> L.
Species
See text

minerals including calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, and manganese. However their moderately high content of oxalic acid inhibits the absorption of calcium, and also means that they should be avoided or eaten in moderation by people with kidney disorders, gout, or rheumatoid arthritis.

The flowers of the Hopi Red Dye amaranth were used by the Hopi Indians as the source of a deep red dye. This dye has been supplanted by a coal tar dye known as Red No. 2 in North America and E123 in the E.E.C., also known as amarynth.

The genus also contains several well-known ornamental plants, such as love-lies-bleeding (*A. caudatus*), a native of India and a vigorous, hardy annual with dark purplish flowers crowded in handsome drooping spikes. Another species *A. hypochondriacus*, is prince's feather, another Indian annual, with deeply-veined lance-shaped leaves, purple on the under face, and deep crimson flowers densely packed on erect spikes.

Myth, Legend and Poetry

Amaranth, or Amarant (from the Greek *amarantos*, unwithering), a name chiefly used in poetry, and applied to Amaranth and other plants which, from not soon fading, typified immortality. Thus, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, iii. 353:

"Immortal amarant, a flower which once
In paradise, fast by the tree of life,
Began to bloom; but soon for man's offence
To heaven removed, where first it grew, there grows,
And flowers aloft, shading the fount of life,
And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven
Rolls o'er elysian flowers her amber stream:
With these that never fade the spirits elect
Bind their resplendent locks."

It should be noted that the original spelling of the word is amarant; the more common spelling amaranth seems to have come from a folk etymology that the final syllable derives from the Greek word anthos ("flower"), which enters into a vast number of botanical names.

In ancient Greece the amaranth (also called chrusanthemon and elichrusos) was sacred to Ephesian Artemis. It was supposed to have special healing properties, and as a symbol of immortality was used to decorate images of the gods and tombs. In legend, Amarynthus (a form of Amarantus) was a hunter of Artemis and king of Euboea; in a village of Amarynthus, of which he was the eponymous hero, there was a famous temple of Artemis Amarynthia or Amarysia (Strabo x. 448; Pausan. i. 31, p. 5).

Amaranth is also the name of the otherworldly pantheon that amuses itself by toying with individuals' luck in Tim Lebbon's novella "The Unfortunate".

In White Wolf Game Studio's *Vampire: The Dark Ages* books and role-playing games, *Amaranth* is the medieval name of what then was widely known as *Diablerie* (consuming the blood and soul of another vampire).

Selected species

- *Amaranthus acanthochiton* (Greenstripe)
- *Amaranthus acutilobius* (Sharplobe Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus albus* (White Pigweed, Prostrate Pigweed, Pigweed Amaranth)

- *Amaranthus arenicola* (Sandhill Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus australis* (Southern Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus bigelovii* (Bigelow's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus blitoides* (Mat Amaranth, Prostrate Amaranth, Prostrate Pigweed)
- *Amaranthus blitum* (Purple Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus brownii* (Brown's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus californicus* (California Amaranth, California Pigweed)
- *Amaranthus cannabinus* (Tidal-marsh Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus caudatus* (Loves-lies-bleeding, Pendant Amaranth, Tassel Flower, Quilete)
- *Amaranthus chihuahuensis* (Chihuahuan Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus chlorostachys*
- *Amaranthus crassipes* (Spreading Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus crispus* (Crispleaf Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus cruentus* (Purple Amaranth, Red Amaranth, Mexican Grain Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus deflexus* (Large-fruit Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus dubius* (Spleen Amaranth, Khada Sag)
- *Amaranthus fimbriatus* (Fringed Amaranth, Fringed Pigweed)
- *Amaranthus floridanus* (Florida Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus greggii* (Gregg's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus hybridus* (Smooth Amaranth, Smooth Pigweed, Red Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus hypochondriacus* (Prince-of-Wales-feather, Princess Feather)
- *Amaranthus leucocarpus*
- *Amaranthus lineatus* (Australian Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus mantegazzianus* (Quinoa de Castilla)
- *Amaranthus minimus*
- *Amaranthus muricatus* (African Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus obcordatus* (Trans-Pecos Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus palmeri* (Palmer's Amaranth, Carelessweed)
- *Amaranthus paniculus* (Reuzen Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus polygonoides* (Tropical Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus powellii* (Green Amaranth, Powell Amaranth, Powell Pigweed)
- *Amaranthus pringlei* (Pringle's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus pumilus* (Seaside Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus quitensis* (Ataco, Sangorache)
- *Amaranthus retroflexus* (Red-root Amaranth, Redroot Pigweed, Common Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus rudis* (Tall Amaranth, Common Waterhemp)
- *Amaranthus scleropoides* (Bone-bract Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus spinosus* (Spiny Amaranth, Prickly Amaranth, Thorny Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus standleyanus*
- *Amaranthus thunbergii* (Thunberg's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus torreyi* (Torrey's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus tricolor* (Joseph's-coat)
- *Amaranthus tuberculatus* (Rough-fruit Amaranth, Tall Waterhemp)
- *Amaranthus viridis* (Slender Amaranth, Green Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus watsonii* (Watson's Amaranth)
- *Amaranthus wrightii* (Wright's Amaranth)

References and external links

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- J. Murr, *Die Pflanzenwelt in der griech. Mythol.* Plants in Greek Mythology. (1890)
- *Amaranthus hybridus*
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- Flora online : Flora of North America (http://flora.huh.harvard.edu:8080/flora/browse.do?flora_id=1&taxon_id=101257)
- *Amaranthus* Info (<http://amaranth.twoday.net/topics/Amaranthus+Info/>)



Loves-lies-bleeding
(*Amaranthus caudatus*)



Green Amaranth (*A. hybridus*)



Seabeach amaranth (*A. pumilus*), an endangered species of amaranth



Red-root Amaranth (*A. retroflexus*) - from Thomé, *Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* 1885



Spiny Amaranth
(*Amaranthus spinosus*)



Callaloo (*Amaranthus spinosus* "calaloo")



Green Amaranth
(*Amaranthus viridis*)

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Categories: Caryophyllales | Leaf vegetables | Cereals

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