



## ĶIRI

**ĶIRI** (Mid. Pers. *hērīg*), wallflower (*Cheiranthus cheiri* L., synonym: *Erysimum cheiri* (L.) Crantz), a widely cultivated, sweet-smelling, ornamental plant of the mustard family (*Cruciferae*, syn. *Brassicaceae*), which often grows on old walls, rocks, and quarries, particularly limestone (Simpson and Weiner, XIX, p. 854; Tutin et al., pp. 328-29). C. C. Townsend and E. Guest (p. 1063) and J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (p. 80) speculate that the genus name, *Cheiranthus*, comes from *kiyri*, or from the Greek *cheir* “hand,” combined with the Greek *anthos*, flower, thus “hand-flower,” that is, a flower carried in the hand for its fragrance. In England, “wallflower” also refers to an unpartnered woman or man sitting along the wall at a dance, often because of shyness or unpopularity (Houghton Mifflin, p. 1936).

The Persian names of this plant, besides *ķiri*, include *ķir*, *ķiru*, *šabbu*, *šabbu-ye zard*, and *gol e hamiš-bahār* (Dehkhoda; Grami, p. 470; Zargari, pp. 204-7). The real *šabbu* (*Matthiola incana* [L.] W. T. Aiton; Eng. stock) is an annual cut flower, widely cultivated. *Ķiri* seems to be the only acceptable Persian name for this plant, especially considering the epithet of the species name.

The wallflower is a perennial small shrub 25-80 cm, sometimes biennial in cultivation. It has narrow bright green leaves, with conspicuous leaf-scars at the lower part of the stem. The fragrant flowers occur in broad clusters, predominantly yellow, although the color may vary from orange to red and brown, sometimes shaded or veined with contrasting color. Many modern cultivars may be of hybrid origin. The fruit is a silique, linear, strongly dorsally compressed, and hairy. The seed is brown, compressed, about 3 mm,



and more or less pubescent (Townsend and Guest, pp. 1063-64; Tutin et al., 1993, pp. 328-29; Zargari, pp. 204-07). The origin of this plant is not known (Tutin et al., pp. 328-29), and it does not seem to be native to Iran (Hedge and Rechinger, *passim*).

*Kiri* is cultivated in many regions of Iran for its alluring yellow flowers and as a honey plant (Zargari, p. 204). It contains cheirantin and other cardioactive glycosides (Prajapati et al., p. 133). The flowers are used as a diuretic, emmenagogue, cardioactive, and purgative. Powdered seed is administered in dysentery, and the seed oil is applied locally for bruises, as well as nervous and rheumatic pains (Pullaiah, p. 523). Wallflower was used as a diuretic, but its powerful effect on the heart was not known. It is cardiotonic in small doses, supporting a failing heart in a manner similar to foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), and is toxic in larger doses (Chevalier, p. 185; Prajapati, p. 133; Zargari, p. 207).

In the Pahlavi text *Kusraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ēw*, the king asks the page which flowers have the finest scent. The latter praises a series of flowers, including the red *hērīg* (“like the scent of friends”) and the yellow (“like the scent of a noblewoman”; Azarnouche, Unvala, secs. 74-75).

*Kiri* is mentioned in classical Persian poetry as a yellow flower, in reference to a gold and yellowish, pale face (Grami, p. 470). For instance:

*Rokam baguna-ye k̄iri šod’ast za’ndoh o ġam;*

*Del az tafakkor-e besyār k̄ira gašt o dežam.*

(Abu Ṭāher Kosravāni [d. 342/953]; see Modabberi, ed., p. 118).

My face has turned like *k̄iri* from sorrow and grief;  
And my heart gloomy and sad from too much thinking.

*Ze ganjaš zamin kisa bar-dukta;*

*Saman sim o k̄iri zar andukta.*

(Nezāmi [d. 1209], *Šaraf-nāma*, p. 936)

The ground has made a sack of its treasury;  
Jasmin has saved silver and *k̄iri* gold.

*Bar to javān guna-ye piri čerā’st?*

*Lāla-ye kodru-ye to k̄iri čefā’st?*

(Nezāmi, *Maḡzan al-asrār*, p. 164)



Why have your young cheeks turned aged?  
Why has your wild red tulip turned *kiri* (yellow)?

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