

CINQUEFOIL

Potentilla



Potentilla /ˌpɒtənˈtɪlə/ is a genus containing over 300 species of annual, biennial and perennial herbaceous flowering plants in the rose family, Rosaceae. They are usually called cinquefoils in English. *Potentilla* are generally only found throughout the northern continents of the world.

Typical cinquefoils look most similar to strawberries, but differ in usually having dry, inedible fruit (hence the name "barren strawberry" for some species). Many cinquefoil species have palmate leaves. Some species have just three leaflets, while others have 15 or more leaflets arranged pinnately. The flowers are usually yellow, but may be white, pinkish or red. The accessory fruits are usually dry but may be fleshy and strawberry-like, while the actual seeds – each one technically a single fruit – are tiny nuts.

In heraldry, the cinquefoil emblem or *potentilla* signified strength, power, honor, and loyalty. Depiction of the five-petalled flower appears as early as 1033, in the architecture of the church built in the village of Reulle-Vergy in Burgundy, France, two years before the reign of William the Conqueror. The cinquefoil emblem was used generously in the architecture of numerous churches built in Normandy and Brittany through the 15th century.

Some species are used in herbalism. Common tormentil (*P. erecta*), for example, has been used as an herbal remedy for inflammation and gastrointestinal disorders. Research continues to determine its safety and usefulness as an alternative medicine for such disorders as ulcerative colitis. *Potentilla discolor* and *P. multifida* are Chinese medicinal herbs used to treat diabetes.