

California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)

Poppy Family (*Papaveraceae*)

By Bill Trotter

This is the California State Flower. The genus was named after Johanna Friedrich Eschscholz, a Russian surgeon and botanist of the early 1800s who came with the Russian expeditions to the Pacific Coast in 1816 and 1824. There is a specimen of *Eschscholzia californica* in a herbarium in Leningrad. While *Eschscholzia californica* is mildly sedative and analgesic, it is not a non-addictive alternate to the opium poppy, as some mistakenly believe. American Indians (and some herbal practitioners in England) used it as a safe and gentle sedative, and in the treatment of spastic colon and gall bladder conditions.

The Spanish Californians called it Dormidera, “the drowsy one”, because the petals fold in the evening. They also fried the blossoms in olive oil, added perfume and used it to make their hair grow and shine. The colorful petals have also been used in salads (from home garden plants), but have little food value.

Annual or perennial, from a heavy taproot, erect or spreading, up to 2' high, not hairy, sometimes covered with a generally whitish or bluish waxy or powdery film that is sometimes easily rubbed off. This is a highly variable plant (more than 90 varieties have been described). Found on grassy slopes and flats below 2000'. Common Flowers: February to September.