

Flora of Engadine

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FLORA OF THE ENGADINE

The vegetation of the Engadine owes its distinctive character to the remarkable climatic and geographical conditions, and is influenced in particular by the elevation of the district above sea-level. While the limit of regulation coincides for the most part with the line of perpetual snow, though frequently passing beyond it, the warm winds from the south, traversing the valley, exercise a favourable influence upon the vegetation.

Although on the one hand this high Alpine flora stands in marked contrast to that of the plains, on the other hand it shows considerable divergence from that of the Central and Western Alps, and while the vegetation is practically confined to the wild growths of the forests, the meadows, and the mountain pastures, it presents to the botanist, within these limits, an extraordinary variety of species.

Although our Alpine valley is destitute of the adornment of orchard trees and deciduous trees in general, their absence is compensated for by the dark forests of fir and pine, among which many noble trees may be found, as well as by the light-green larches, the foremost place among the forest trees of the Engadine is claimed, however, by the beautiful cembra pine, the cedar of the Alps. This, the finest of all our coniferous trees, with its strangely twisted, arched branches and its green, aromatic tufts of needles, has its true habitat here on the shores of the Alpine lakes and on the débris heaps of the transverse ridges, luxuriantly carpeted with mosses and gaily coloured lichens.

The saying that "Engadine is the botanist's Paradise" is perfectly true. While the women are proud of the geraniums and pinks to which they devote such unremitting care, with such pleasing results, the lover of Alpine flowers will find in the meadows and on the high pastures and mountain slopes many a beautiful and rare specimen. Distinctively Alpine species both of cryptogamic and phanerogamic plants are very numerous here, and we believe that no other district of equal area would yield a greater variety. St. Moritz is perhaps the best headquarters for the botanist in the Alps.

It is not within the scope of this article to serve as a guide to the botanist, but we have thought it well to give a few examples of some of the most striking representations of the Upper Engadine flora.

To those desirous of pursuing the subject further we can recommend the beautiful "Alpenflora", with coloured plates of 170 widely diffused species of Alpine plants, by Schröter, with brief botanical descriptions in German, French and English.

The orders most abundantly represented are the Ranunculaceae or Butter-cup tribe, the Cruciferae or Cruciferous tribe, the Caryophyllaceae or Chickweed tribe, the Papilionaceae or Pea tribe, the Compositae or Compound flowers, the Primulaceae or Primrose variety, the Gentianeae or Gentian tribe, the Scrophularineae or Figwort tribe, the Cyperaceae or Sedge tribe, and the Gramineae or Grasses.

Special mention must be made of the queens of the Alpine flora, the Alpenrose, and the Edelweiss, *Leontopodium Alpinum* Cass. Both the Fringed Alpenrose (*Rhododendron hirsutum*) and the Rust-red Alpenrose (*Rhododendron ferrugineum*) flourish here, covering spacious slopes and adorning steep rocky acclivities all over the Engadine.

(From "St. Moritz Courier".)

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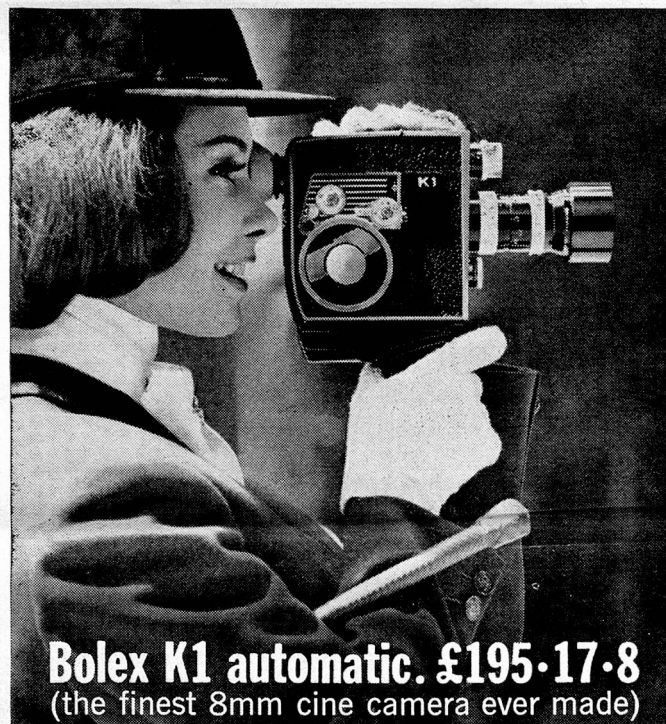
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