

MINT NOTES

By R. GRAHAM.

I. MENTHA RUBRA

MENTHA RUBRA Miller. The earliest use of the binomial *Mentha rubra* appears in the 8th Edition of Miller's (1768) *Gardener's Dictionary*, with the following description: "Mentha (Rubra) spicis confertis interruptis, foliis oblongo-ovatis acuminatis dentatis sessilibus. Mint with interrupted spikes of flowers growing together, and oblong, oval, acute-pointed, indented leaves, sitting close to the stalk. Mentha rotundifolia rubra, aurantii odore. Mor. Hist., 3, 369. Round-leaved red Mint, smelling like an Orange, commonly called Orange Mint." On the page following that on which the above formal description appears Miller further says: "The ninth sort [i.e., *Mentha rubra* Miller] is commonly called Orange Mint, from its scent, which is somewhat like that of the rind of Orange. This rises with an upright smooth stalk about the same height with the common Mint, but does not branch out like that; the leaves are much broader than those of the common sort; the indentures on their edges are deep, and they end in acute points. The spikes of flowers grow in clusters on the top of the stalks, which are interrupted; they are of a pale colour, and their stamina are shorter than the petal. It is commonly cultivated in gardens for its pleasant scent."

In Miller's above description the reference to Morison's Orange Mint (*M. citrata* Ehrh. = *M. odorata* Sole) is erroneous. Smith (1800: *Observations on the British Species of Mentha: Transactions of the Linnean Society*, 5, 188) points this out in a long paragraph. This reference should be consulted, together with a sheet in Smith's herbarium (at the Linnean Society) which bears two specimens named "*Mentha rubra* Miller" in Smith's own handwriting. The following, however, is the substance of Smith's remarks.

Smith states that Miller named his *M. rubra* from two specimens, which later came into Smith's possession. These specimens are not Morison's Orange Mint, as indeed Miller would have realised had he consulted Morison's figure, but, as they happened erroneously to bear the formula for Morison's Orange Mint, Miller described them, and included the erroneous reference on the herbarium sheet as a synonym in the latter part of his description.

Unfortunately it is not yet possible to know exactly which mint was intended by Miller to apply to the name *Mentha rubra*. The two specimens, referred to above, are different mints. One is the hybrid of *Mentha viridis* L. with *M. rotundifolia* (L.) Huds. (= \times *M. cordifolia* Opiz) and the other is the plant sometimes considered a lacinate-leaved variety of *M. viridis* L., but which is more probably a spicate sport of

×*M. crispa* L. Evidence is incomplete as to whether Miller intended one or both of these specimens to be covered by his name *M. rubra*, and there is the possibility here of a *nomen confusum*, but it is to be hoped that further specimens will be forthcoming to enable a decision to be made to establish *Mentha rubra* Miller as applying to one hybrid or the other.

×**Mentha Smithiana** R. Graham, nom. nov. (*M. rubra* Smith, 1800: *Trans. Linn. Soc.*, 5, 205; haud Mill., 1768).

The type sheet is in Smith's herbarium at the Linnean Society. It is necessary to comment on Smith's use of the adjective *tubuloso-campanulatus* in describing the shape of the calyx of both *M. rubra* and *M. gentilis*. Modern usage has differentiated between *tubular* and *campanulate*, the former being indicative of the calyx in the *M. Smithiana* group and the latter in the *M. gentilis* group. In Smith's description of his *M. rubra* the word *tubuloso-campanulatus* should be translated as *tubular* as opposed to *campanulate*; the same adjective, in his description of *M. gentilis*, should be read as *campanulate*.

Hudson's *M. rubra* appears in 1778: *Flora Anglica*, Ed. 2, 1; 252, but is doubly illegitimate, being a later homonym of *M. rubra* Miller and being used in place of the older name *M. gentilis* L. As no specimen of Hudson's *M. rubra* appears to exist (many of his specimens were destroyed by fire) it is impossible to tell, as a matter of interest, whether his plant was the same as Smith's *M. rubra*, which is at least highly possible.

×**MENTHA SMITHIANA** R. Graham var. **angustifolia** R. Graham, var. nov. Differt a typo foliis lanceolatis acutis.

Stem about 2 feet high, rather slender and flexuous, branched below the main axis, greenish-purple becoming more purple above, more or less glabrous throughout or with a few scattered white hairs, especially under the nodes. Internodes 2 to 5 cms. Leaves lanceolate to narrow-lanceolate, broadest below the middle, gradually attenuate to an acute apex and more shortly attenuate to the long basal petiole, acutely but rather shallowly serrate with teeth directed forwards, glabrous above or with a few scattered hairs mainly on the veins, very thinly hairy beneath; largest leaves 3 × 6.5 cms.; serratures 10 to 14 on each side. Petioles 3 cms. long on largest leaves. Bracts similar to the leaves, gradually reduced in size upwards with correspondingly shorter petioles, the uppermost more or less entire, very narrow, just exceeding the verticils. Verticils large, the lower ones pedunculate. Pedicels greenish-purple or purple, glabrous or with occasional horizontally-spreading white hairs. Bracteoles 4 to 5 cms. long, very narrowly lanceolate, glabrous or with a few scattered short white hairs on the margin. Calyx-tube tubular, glandular, glabrous, with teeth rather over half the length of the tube. Stamens included.

This most unusual-looking mint was discovered by Mr F. M. Day beside a stream at Stoke Gabriel, South Devon, v.-c. 3, in 1938. The above description is taken from the type specimen which was collected

in the subsequent year, and is among Mr Still's mints at the British Museum. The chief distinction from type $\times M. Smithiana$ R. Graham lies in the narrowly lanceolate leaves and bracts, which, in extreme cases, become three times as long as broad and bear a strong resemblance to the leaves of $\times M. cardiaca$ Baker. It is, however, readily distinguished from both the *M. cardiaca* group and the *M. gentilis* group by the calyx-tube, which is tubular as opposed to campanulate, and by the large verticils and subspicate inflorescence, which, though sometimes occurring in these two groups, are both common characters of the *M. Smithiana* group.