

Wild Flowers, Garden Produce and Loans from English

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Since the beginning of 1978 I have been working on a project to collect the traditional names of plants in all parts of Wales. Wild flowers, trees, vegetables, herbs, mosses and fungi - I have tried to cover the full range.

The motivation for this work is straightforward. These traditional names are varied and often interesting, but they are disappearing rapidly as we lose the older generation of dialect-speakers to whom they are a familiar part of everyday life. Younger people may retain more or less intact the main phonological features of their dialect and much local vocabulary of a general nature, but specialised semantic fields such as plant names seem particularly vulnerable. Either standard Welsh terms replace local dialect forms, or - and this is perhaps the more common response - English terminology is adopted wholesale. In this situation of rapid change I felt that it was important to record the traditional names in all their diversity, and to make this rich resource available to a wider Welsh-speaking public.

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Fieldwork

A project of this kind poses some interesting problems with respect to fieldwork. The crucial consideration must be to find individuals with the relevant specialised knowledge, and since they are by now very few this is no easy task. Not all dialect-speakers, however fluent, will prove to be suitable informants. Many people are simply not very interested in plants, and have never bothered to learn their names. In the search for those who can help there seems to be no real choice but to rely on an informal network of personal contacts and recommendations. I often found that questions as to who was a keen gardener, or who was known to make traditional herbal remedies would lead me in the right direction.

I myself was fortunate in being able to work out from the Welsh Folk Museum grapevine. Over the years the staff of the museum have come to know of good informants in all parts of Wales, people who can remember the old way of life and are interested in passing on their knowledge. Many of these people were a mine of information on plant names, and others were able to pass me on to a neighbour or a friend who could help.

There are of course difficulties with this approach, the most serious being that the coverage achieved is bound to be uneven. In some districts the grapevine works well and everything goes smoothly. Elsewhere it breaks down, and the search may in the end be fruitless. Alternative strategies however are even less satisfactory. If for instance we decide beforehand on a set number of villages scattered at equal intervals across the area, it is quite possible that there will be no suitable informants living in any of them. Better to have a few gaps here and there than to risk drawing a total blank.

The coverage achieved was uneven for other reasons too. Almost everyone could supply the local name for a large number of common plants - among the wild flowers for instance 'daisy', 'buttercup', 'dandelion', 'clover', 'primrose', 'bluebell', 'stinging nettle' and 'foxglove'. Beyond this core however

informants varied considerably in the range of plants with which they were familiar. To some extent this could be ascribed to differences in the environment. Some lived in mountainous areas, others on the coast, and others again in lush farming country. But there was also clearly an element of personal idiosyncrasy involved, as one would reveal a detailed knowledge of garden flowers while another would prove to be far more interested in the wild plants of the countryside.

One final set of gaps arose from the fact that I am no more than a passable amateur botanist. Inevitably from time to time someone would point out a plant which was new to me. When this happened I turned to the staff of the National Museum of Wales Department of Botany for help in identifying this new specimen, and then added it to my list. The resources available for fieldwork did not however allow me to go back and check on such items in areas already visited. I hope to fill residual gaps of this nature over the next few years in the course of fieldwork trips associated with other projects.

Questioning Strategies

When one has tracked down suitable informants, there remains the problem of how best to go about questioning them. I found that it was useful to combine a number of different strategies. The most obvious approach was to show the informant a plant and ask its name. When circumstances permitted we would go for a walk in the surrounding countryside or wander around the garden. At other times this was not possible for reasons of ill-health or bad weather, and I would instead pick a selection of those wild flowers which were growing locally and bring them into the house.

The disadvantage of this method is that its scope is limited to those plants which are present at a particular time of year in the immediate neighbourhood. Where necessary therefore I adopted an alternative strategy, that of showing pictures of plants and asking their names. With a book of good quality photographs such as Phillips (1977) this method was quite effective, and enabled me to ask about the names of plants familiar to the informant but unavailable at the time.

In addition two other kinds of questions often proved useful. One of these involved exploiting the cultural associations of particular plants, and was feasible only when I felt that I knew enough about the background to predict likely responses. Highly specific questions about childhood games, for instance, could be relied on to elicit the names for 'ribwort plantain', 'burdock', and 'conkers'. Other similar questions referred to traditional herbal remedies and to plants regarded as signs of the changing seasons.

In the second place there were general 'trawl' questions. What weeds grew in the cornfields in the old days? What flowers did you have in the garden? Did you pick wild berries at all? The answers to such questions were usually predictable enough, but they did have the advantage of leading on occasion to something new and unexpected.

This flexibility was important as informants were on the whole not botanically sophisticated, and had not acquired the knowledge I was attempting to tap in any formal way. In a reasonably informal face to face conversation it was possible for me to try out the various different approaches and find out which was most helpful with any one individual.

Drawing up a suitable questionnaire for a postal survey would on the other hand have presented quite serious problems. It is common in Welsh lexical dialectology to take advantage of the fact that the informants are normally bilingual in Welsh and English.¹ They are presented with an English word and asked for the local Welsh equivalent. In my experience however people were often not effectively bilingual with regard to such things as plant names. They had learnt the Welsh forms

naturally as children, and had never needed to know the English. Framing the questionnaire in terms of the standard Welsh names would have given rise to similar problems, as these too were unfamiliar to most people. It seems therefore that the extra time and effort involved in visiting all the informants individually was well worthwhile, and may have been crucial to the success of the project.

Two further points are perhaps worth mentioning briefly. Firstly, I did not tape these conversations. We were often walking around outside as we talked, and it would have been inconvenient and distracting to try and ensure a reasonable quality of recording at the same time. I relied rather on taking notes as we went along. Secondly, I supplemented my own fieldwork with information culled from a number of other sources - published dialect glossaries such as Morris (1910) and Fynes-Clinton (1913), unpublished theses such as Glanmor Davies's study of Ceinewydd Welsh (1934), and unpublished lists of dialect forms from the Welsh Folk Museum archive.

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In spite of the problems mentioned above, I feel that this project was a success. On a personal level I enjoyed myself. I met a great many interesting people; I learned a lot; and my garden is the richer for all the roots and cuttings which were pressed on me. More generally, an enormous amount of material was collected, much of it to the best of my knowledge never before noted down, and I hope that this will in due course be published in an accessible, readable format.

I should now, for the rest of this paper, like to concentrate on just one aspect of this material, namely the way that loans from English have infiltrated this semantic field.²

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Garden Flowers

Looking first at garden flowers, we find that here the influence of English is clear in many of the traditional names. In the simplest cases the Welsh name is a straightforward approximation to the sound of the English.

<u>lafant</u>	'lavender'
<u>cwlwmbéi</u>	'columbine'
<u>leloc</u>	'lilac'
<u>blodau sgyrshon</u>	'nasturtium'
<u>blodau'r oloc</u>	'hollyhock'

Sometimes the source is obvious; at other times we must look to older forms or to regional dialect.

<u>twmdili</u>	'daffydowndilly'	ie 'daffodil'
<u>jilifflŵar</u>	'gillyflower'	ie 'wallflower'
<u>coeden drops</u>	'drops'	ie 'fuchsia'

Folk etymology takes things one step further. While preserving some similarity to the sound of the English, the loan has now been completely refashioned using native Welsh elements. Its English origin is no longer immediately apparent and it can easily be taken for a traditional Welsh name, fully appropriate to the flower in question. Consider for instance the following two names for the 'peony'.

<u>y beunes</u>	'peony'
<u>buan rhos</u>	

Both appear at first glance to be natural descriptive Welsh forms. Y beunes 'the pea-hen' refers to the bright colours of these flowers, buan rhos 'swift rose' to the way the petals drop so quickly. When however we take into account the fact that these names were collected in south-west Wales alongside such obvious English loans as peion, peiam and pion, their true origin becomes clear. Both involve the reworking of a borrowed form to give an acceptable, meaningful name in Welsh. One of the Welsh names for 'chamomile' presents a similar picture.

<u>y ganmil</u>	'chamomile'
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Here again the first impression is of a native form - y ganmil 'the hundred thousand' - perhaps motivated by the fine, feathery leaves of this plant. It is however far more likely that what we have here is a further adaptation of such common loan forms as y gamil and y gawmil, the Welsh camouflage successfully disguising its English origin.

'Hidden loans' also appear in the form of literal, word-for-word translations of English names.

<u>lili'r dyffryn</u>	'lily of the valley'
<u>balchder Llundain</u>	'London pride'
<u>n'ad fi'n angof</u>	'forget me not'
<u>Lisa brysur</u>	'busy Lizzie'

And here too, as with straightforward loans, the source may be an English dialect form.

<u>hen ŵr</u>	'old man' ³	i.e. 'southernwood'
<u>bonet nain</u>	'granny hood'	i.e. 'columbine'

It might of course be argued that names of this kind have developed independently but on the same lines in the two languages. This seems unlikely in most cases, plausible only where the descriptive element is strong.

<u>blodyn yr haul</u>	'sunflower'
<u>procar poeth</u>	'red hot poker'
<u>gwialen aur</u>	'golden rod'

Such parallel development is certainly possible however as we can see from one particularly striking example.

<u>glaswelltyn</u>	'life of man'	i.e. 'day lily'
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In the Welsh of north Pembrokeshire the day lily is known as glaswelltyn, 'blade of grass'. In the south of the county the traditional English name is 'life of man'.⁴ While these two names are clearly not translation equivalents, they do nevertheless derive from the same source. Both refer to the short life of this flower, which opens and drops in a single day. And they do so by means of a verse from Psalm 103: "The days of man are but as grass; for he flourisheth as a flower of the field." Here then the shared cultural background yields two closely related but still distinct names for the same flower across the language barrier.

The geographical distribution of these loan forms varies a good deal. Some are common throughout Wales - jilifflŵar 'wallflower', lafant 'lavender', lili'r dyffryn 'lily of the valley'. Others are confined to certain districts. We see from maps 1 to 3 for instance that blodau sgyrshon 'nasturtium' appears only in north Wales, peiam etc 'peony' only in the south-west, and twmdili 'daffodil' only in Pembrokeshire and western districts of Carmarthenshire. In each case other parts of Wales retain a wide range of native Welsh names.⁵

Wild Flowers

If it is common for garden flowers to be given names borrowed in some way from English, the same is not true of wild flowers. Here the picture is very different. Most names are clearly Welsh, and loans are largely confined to two highly specific contexts.

First then, those plants which are important to the farmer, either as weeds or as a crop. 'Charlock' for instance is a well-known weed of cornfields, and among the many names given to this nuisance are two of English origin.

<u>ceglogs</u> / <u>cedlocs</u>	'charlock'
<u>hatrish</u>	

In Montgomeryshire the local form is ceglogs or cedlocs, and in north Pembrokeshire it is hatrish, as shown in map 4. Both of these names come from adjacent English dialects. Ceglogs has slipped over the border from Shropshire, where 'kedlocks' is traditional.⁶ And hatrish corresponds to the English term 'headridge' found in south Pembrokeshire.⁷ This latter form has no counterpart in the the dialects of England, and one might be tempted to argue that it is a Welsh word borrowed by the 'down belows'. Similar names do however turn up in other Germanic languages, and it seems more likely therefore that south Pembrokeshire has preserved an old form lost elsewhere, this is turn being borrowed by Welsh speakers from the north of the county.⁸

A plant which is important rather as a crop is the 'clover', sown with a mixture of grasses to give good quality hay. And here alongside the native Welsh form meillion, we find throughout Wales the English loan clofer.

<u>clofer</u>	'clover'
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There is, as we can see from map 5, an interesting pattern in the exact form of this particular loan. Most of Wales has clofer as the mass noun, and cloferen as the derived singular, used for a single clover plant. In the south-west however the corresponding forms are clofers and clofersen. The English plural 's' has crossed over into Welsh, presumably from an English source such as 'clovers' and remains even in the new singular, its original meaning forgotten.

Other plants of this kind, with English names in some districts, include the following. The first three are weeds; the fourth was at one time commonly grown as fodder for horses.

<u>ragwt</u>	'ragwort'
<u>grownsil</u>	'groundsel'
<u>gold</u>	'corn marigold'
<u>ffetshbys</u>	'vetch'

The second context where English loans are relatively common is the field of traditional herbal medicine. Many of the plants used for medicinal purposes in the old days are known by names of English origin.⁹

<u>horwn</u>	'horehound'
<u>agramwni</u>	'agrimony'
<u>tansli</u>	'tansy'
<u>dail cwmffre</u>	'comfrey'
<u>fioled</u>	'violet'

These examples all imitate the sound of the English in a straightforward manner. In other cases we find instead word-for-word translations.

<u>llygad y dydd</u>	'daisy'
<u>troed yr ebol</u>	'coltsfoot'
<u>dant y llew</u>	'dandelion'

Vegetables, Herbs and Orchard Fruits

This distinction between garden and countryside is found with other plants too. It is common for garden vegetables, culinary herbs and orchard fruit to have names borrowed from English. Wild fruit and trees however rarely do so. Culinary herbs are in fact known exclusively by names of English origin.

<u>mint</u>	'mint'
<u>teim</u>	'thyme'
<u>persli</u>	'parsley'
<u>sats</u>	'sage'
<u>cennin shifi</u>	'chives'
<u>safri fach</u>	'savoury'

A number of vegetables too have only the borrowed English name, with no native equivalent.

<u>pys</u>	'peas'
<u>letis</u>	'lettuce'
<u>cidnabêns</u>	'kidney beans'
<u>tomatos</u>	'tomatoes'

The exact form of the loan sometimes varies, as we see for instance from maps 6 and 7. Winwns 'onions' is characteristic of south and mid Wales, while an alternative form nionod is heard in the north. Similarly tatws 'potatoes' is normal in most of Wales, with an alternative form tato confined to the south-west.

<u>winwns</u>	'onions'
<u>nionod</u>	
<u>tatws</u>	'potatoes'
<u>tato</u>	

In most cases the English source is obvious. Occasionally however we must look to a dialectal origin.

shibwns 'spring onions'

Shibwns, found in south-east Wales, clearly corresponds to the English 'gibbons' which is traditional in adjacent areas such as Gloucestershire and parts of Hereford.¹⁰

Very few vegetables are known solely by native Welsh names; my fieldwork has left me with only four.

<u>ffa</u>	'broad beans'
<u>cennin</u>	'leeks'
<u>erfin</u> / <u>maip</u>	'turnips'
<u>pannas</u>	'parsnips'

And in only a few examples do we find an English loan and a native form side by side.

<u>garetsh</u>	'carrots'
<u>moron</u>	
<u>cabaitsh</u>	'cabbage'
<u>bresych</u>	

Here there is a tendency for the Welsh form to be used in formal contexts, and for the loan to be considered somewhat substandard.

Orchard fruit and soft fruit present a similar picture. It is rare for the native Welsh name to stand alone.

<u>afalau</u>	'apples'
<u>afans</u> / <u>mafon</u>	'raspberries'
<u>mefus</u> / <u>syfi</u>	'strawberries'

It is more usual to find an English loan in competition with the Welsh name.

<u>plwmws</u>	'plums'
<u>eirin</u>	
<u>pêrs</u>	'pears'
<u>gellyg</u>	
<u>shirins</u>	'cherries'
<u>ceirios</u>	

Here again we must from time to time invoke English regional dialect in an attempt to account for the Welsh forms. The standard Welsh name for the 'gooseberry' for instance is eirin Mair, but this is now heard as the normal, dialectal form only in the north-east. As map 8 shows, the rest of Wales uses either gwsberis or ffebrins.

<u>gwsberis</u>	'gooseberries'
<u>ffebrins</u>	
<u>eirin Mair</u>	

There is no problem with gwsberis, but ffebrins is more difficult. The most likely explanation is that it derives from the dialectal 'feaberry', noted in many parts of England. This is itself a modified form of an older form 'theveberry', whose meaning - 'thorn berry' - is particularly appropriate to this fruit.¹¹

Fruit, Berries and Woodland Trees

Turning to wild fruit and berries we find that in most cases the Welsh name is unchallenged. 'Blackberries', 'bilberries', 'cranberries', 'sloes', 'hips', 'haws', 'rowan berries' and 'acorns' are known by native Welsh names only.

'Crab apples' are perhaps the most striking exception. In west Wales they are consistently fale surion bach, literally 'little sour apples', but in the east we find a variety of names, all derived from the English. Map 9 shows the distribution of these forms from north to south along the border - crabaitsh, crabas, crabs and gropwns. Over in Carmarthenshire the local form is crobots.

<u>crabaitsh</u>	'crab apples'
<u>crabas</u>	
<u>crabs</u>	
<u>gropwns</u>	
<u>crobots</u>	
<u>fale surion bach</u>	

Most common trees too are known only by the native Welsh name. This is true for instance of the 'holly', 'ivy', 'oak', 'ash', 'elder', 'willow', 'hazel', 'hawthorn', 'blackthorn' and 'rowan'. Only in a few cases is there an English loan alongside the Welsh. The native form masarnen 'sycamore' for instance is now confined to the north-east. In the south we have instead shicamwren, in the north-east jacan or jacmor.

<u>shicamwren</u>	'sycamore'
<u>jacan</u> / <u>jacmor</u>	
<u>masarnen</u>	

Llwyfen 'elm' is still found in the north, but in the south it has been more or less replaced by the loan form elmen.

<u>elmen</u>	'elm'
<u>llwyfen</u>	

No such clear patterning appears however to be involved in other cases.

<u>bitsh</u>	'beech'
<u>ffawydd</u>	
<u>poplysen</u>	'poplar'
<u>aethnen</u>	
<u>ffŷr</u>	'fir'
<u>ffynidwydd</u>	

Finally, and on a slightly different track, we find that toadstools of all kinds are known by a wide variety of Welsh names. It is only the edible mushroom that has shifted over. Welsh names such as madarch have given way almost completely to loan forms such as mwsharwms.

<u>mwsharwms</u>	'mushrooms'
<u>madarch</u>	

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The pattern that emerges then is clear. Wild flowers, trees and fruit are still on the whole known by the old Welsh names. Loans from English are few, and are in the main confined to particular sets of plants such as agricultural weeds and medicinal herbs. In the garden however we find the reverse situation, with loans from English forming a substantial proportion of the relevant material, and at times threatening to take over completely from the native Welsh vocabulary.

Footnotes

1. See for instance Thomas (1973, p7-9).
2. I have taken into account here only those cases where the informant claimed to be giving me the Welsh name, ignoring those situations when he / she admitted having only an English form with no Welsh equivalent.
3. For the dialectal status of these English forms see Wright (1898).
4. South Pembrokeshire is a long established English-speaking enclave. I carried out no fieldwork myself in such English-speaking areas, and this example is taken from Harris (1974, p54).
5. It should be borne in mind that the boundaries shown on the maps in this paper are tentative only.
6. See Orton and Wright (1974, p119).
7. See Harris (1974, p47).
8. See the entry for hatris in Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru.
9. For the medicinal use of these plants see for instance Culpeper (197-).
10. See Orton and Wright (1974, p165).
11. See Wright (1898).

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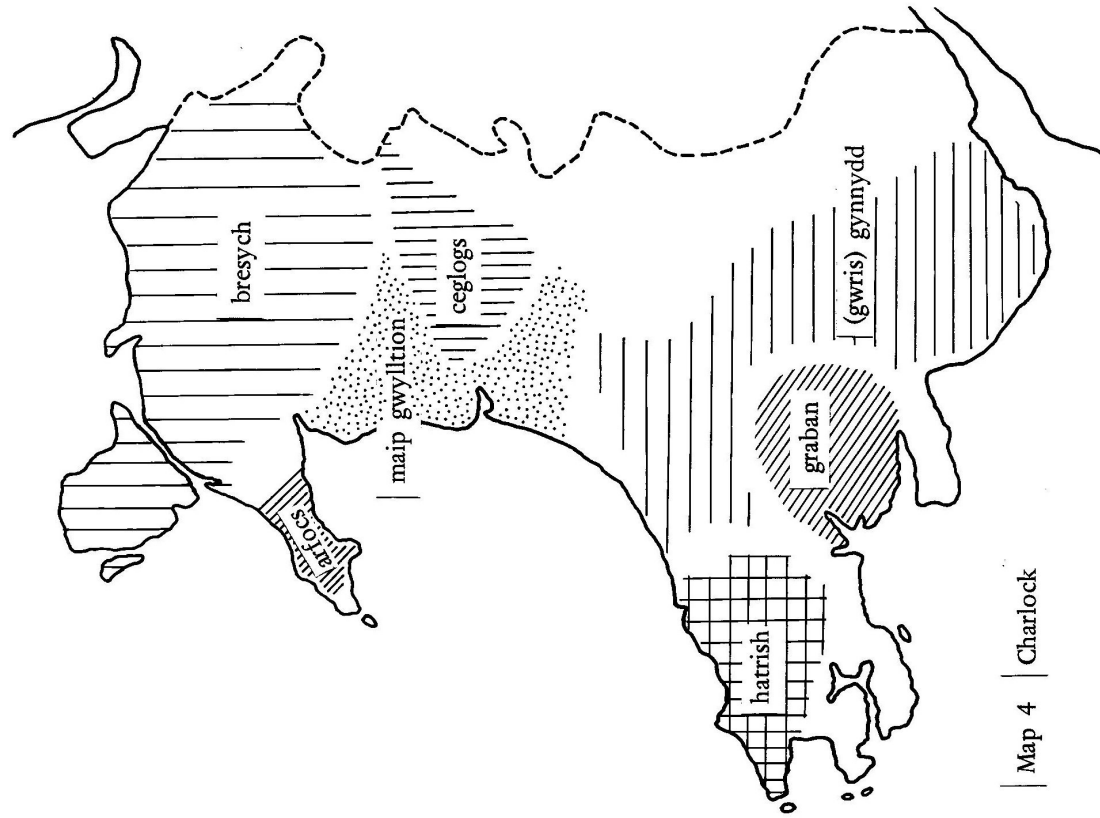
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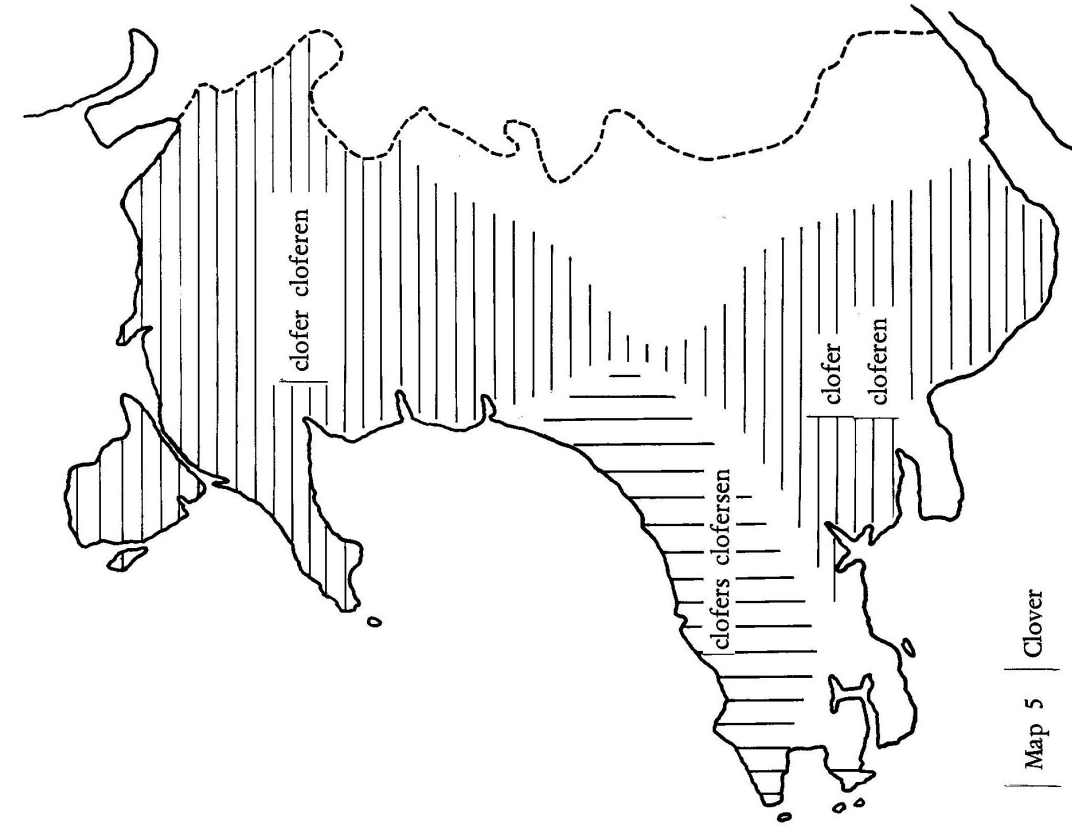


Map 1 | Nasturtium

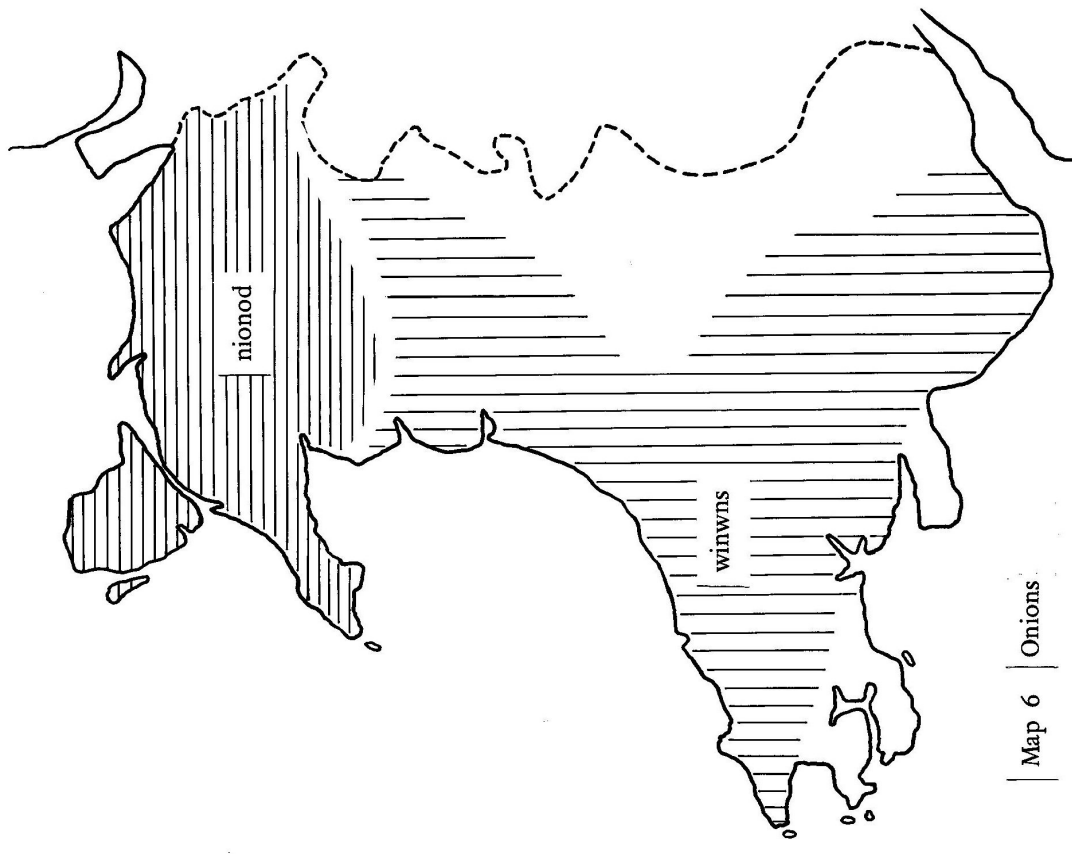


Map 2 | Peony

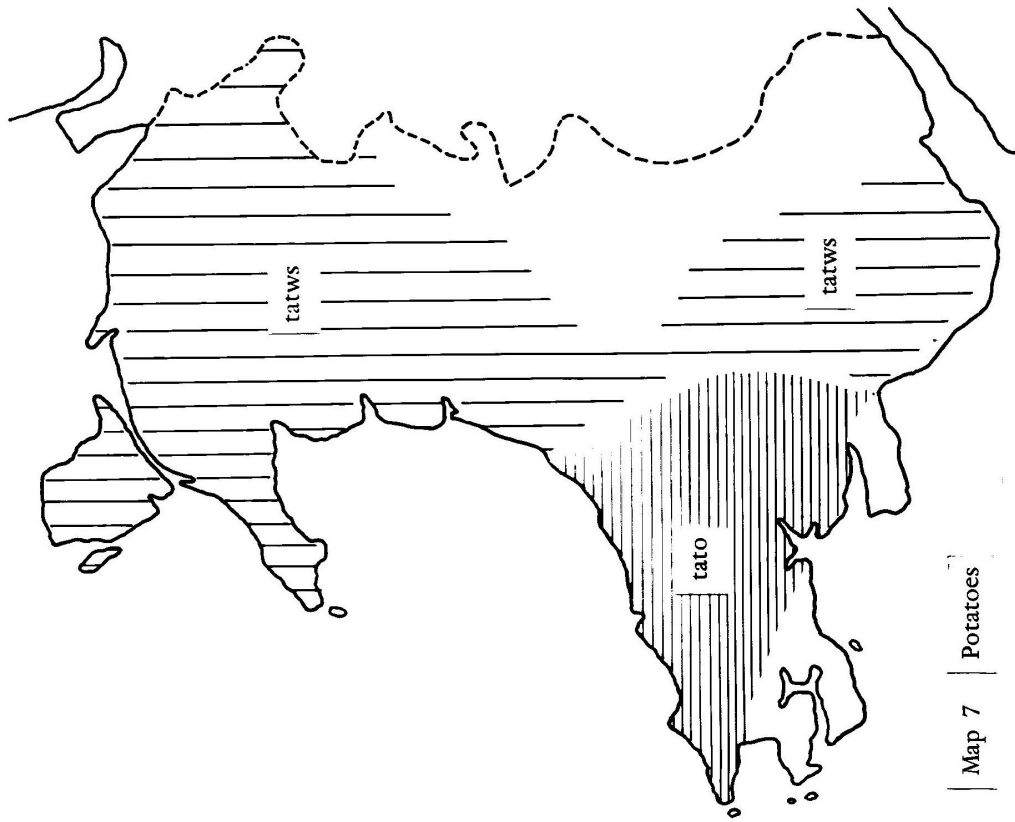




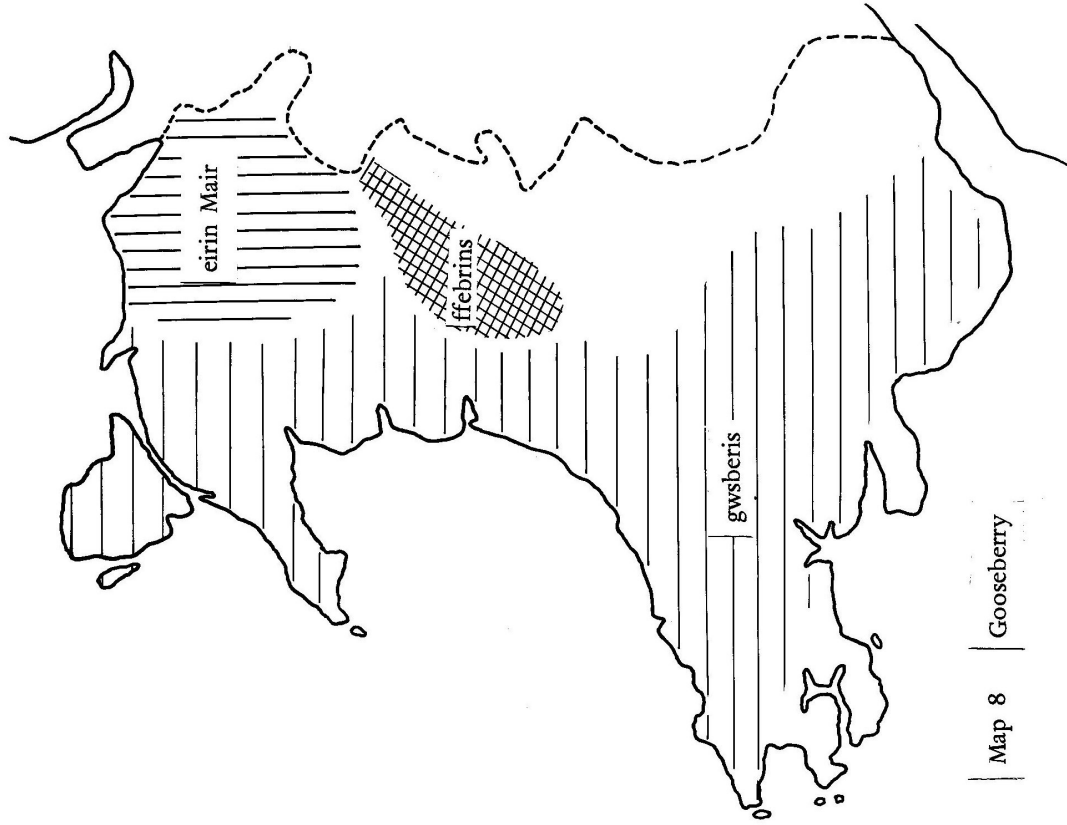
Map 5 | Clover



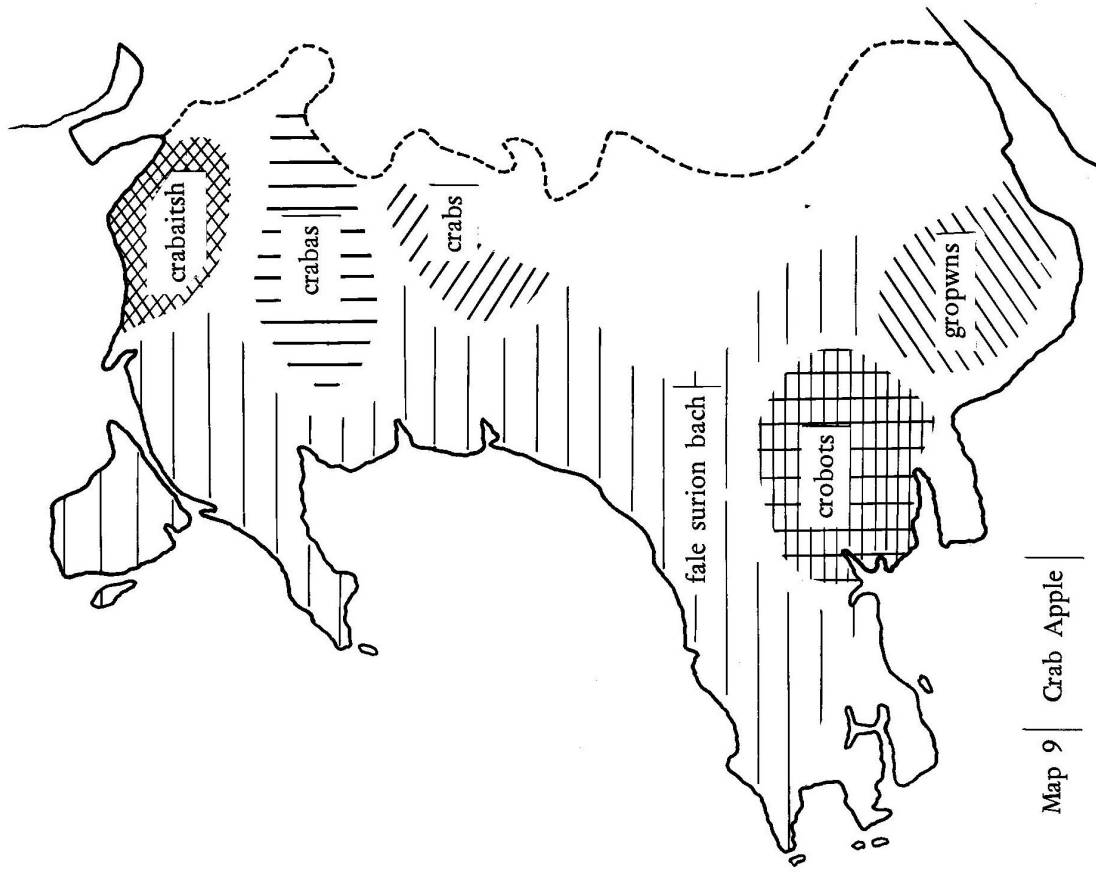
Map 6 | Onions



Map 7 Potatoes



Map 8 Gooseberry



Map 9 | Crab Apple