

Mexican Mock Orange
***Choisya x dewitteana* 'Aztec Pearl'**
Rue Family - *Rutaceae*
non floral scents



Choisya x dewitteana 'Aztec Pearl' is an evergreen shrub with aromatic leaves that have finger like foliage. They are divided into three to five narrow leaflets. The buds are pink-flushed opening to fragrant white flowers in late spring and again in late summer. It is a hybrid between the Arizona orange (*Choisya arizonica*) and the Mexican orange (*Choisya ternata*). The cross was made by England's Peter Moore of Longstock Park Nursery.

'Aztec Pearl' isn't a rare or fussy shrub only good for two sunny days in late June. You will see it in many a garden and no wonder. Its evergreen leaves are attractive and its solitary flowers blooming from the leaf axils smell like oranges. 'Aztec Pearl' can be grown anywhere from full sun to shade and has no problem in drought. If you plant it in a sheltered place away from strong winds and hard frosts, it will thrive. In the Pacific Northwest 'Aztec Pearl' can grow to 2 m/ 6 ft high and 1 m/3 ft wide.

There is a reason *Choisya* 'Aztec Pearl' is a no fuss plant. Both the stems and leaves of *Choisya* 'Aztec Pearl' are highly aromatic. The leaflets have prominent glands along their margins. This gives them a knobby surface texture. The stems are densely glandular too. These glands hold essential oils that protect the plant and attract pollinators. Most plants in the rue family (*Rutaceae*) have these glands as well.

When you crush the leaves, they have a pleasant medicinal smell. Many quinoline alkaloids have been isolated from leaves of Mexican orange. These are natural occurring chemical compounds. Some of these alkaloids show antiseptic effects and others can block growths that may become cancerous. In Mexican folk medicine *Choisya ternata* is used to treat 'nervios', a condition close to the Western one of anxiety and depression. It is being investigated by

scientists for possible anti-depressant and anti-inflammatory effects, and as a painkiller as well. Choisya just might be one of the many plants that is a mini-medicine cabinet all on its own.

The genus name honours Jacques Denis Choisy (1799-1859), a Swiss botanist and professor of philosophy at Geneva. The species cross '*dewitteana*' means a collection of white ones, referring to the flowers. The Dutch surname Dewitt translates as 'the white one', while 'eana' is a Latin origin suffix used in English to convert proper names into a collection.

One thing we know for sure is that the bees love Choisya flowers. They produce a lot of nectar. The bees are there for spring and back again in late summer.

The pictures of 'Aztec Pearl' were taken in the Fragrance Garden in VanDusen. It was mid February and the buds were already forming. The flower picture is from Nature Garden website.



You can see glands on the stems and on the knobby looking leaves.

<https://bredbypetermoore.co.uk/plant/choisya-aztec-pearl/>

<https://northwesthort.org/horticulture/choisyas/>

<https://davisla.wordpress.com/2012/04/19/plant-of-the-week-choisya-x-dewitteana-aztec-pearl/>

<https://www.nature-and-garden.com/gardening/aztec-pearl-choisya.htm>

Flowering Plant Families of the World: Heywood/Brummitt/Culham/Seber