

## Rapunzel, Rapunzel...let down your golden hair!

By Jan Haldeman



This is a repeat for some of you. Since evening primroses are making quite a show in our area in 2006, I 'm recycling this 2003 "Pause for Plants".

Rapunzel, Rapunzel...let down your golden hair!

Rapunzel, a wildflower known here as "evening primrose," is producing its golden yellow blossoms along roadsides now. Each evening some open and

remain open all night, closing the next morning. Its pollinators are mainly moths that are active at night. Flowers may open so rapidly at dusk that they can be caught in the act!



Though native to temperate regions of America, evening primrose species have been naturalized in Europe, where they have long been valued for food and medicine. The plant is called "rampion" or "rapunzel" in German. The roots are harvested, cooked and used in salads. It is the same healthful, edible herb that is featured in Grimm's fairy tale, and for which the child Rapunzel was named! Many of the web sites with information about this species originate in Germany.

Evening primrose's genus name, *Oenothera*, comes from Greek oinos, "wine," and thera, "to imbibe". This refers to an ancient use of the plant to flavor wines. The species name

*biennis* is actually factual, because they are biennials. Their seeds grow into a low leafy rosette, or circle of ground hugging leaves during their first year, then in their second year, they produce a tall ( up to 5 feet ) leafy blooming stalk with flowers concentrated at the tips. There are several other species of evening primrose that grow in our area, including another large flowered yellow one called "sundrops." Then there's a lovely spring blooming pink species the Showy Evening Primrose, *Oenothera speciosa*. Many of these



are available now at garden shops for home planting as ornamentals.

Evening primrose seeds contain high concentrations of gamma-linolenic acid GLA, which is also found in various nuts. Our bodies convert GLA to a hormone-like substance called "prostaglandin," which has anti-inflammatory properties. There is evidence that GLA is effective for treatment of patients with rheumatoid arthritis. A number of animal studies have demonstrated that evening primrose oil (EPO) reduces blood cholesterol as well as to lowers LDLs and increases HDLs. Anticancer activity has been demonstrated in laboratory trials, and skin conditions such as eczema and scleroderma have responded to supplements of EPO. As with all herbal remedies, consult a doctor before use!

True primroses are members of a different plant family, Primulaceae. These are some of the first wildflowers to bloom in the spring, especially in Europe. Primrose means "first" rose.

**Common evening primrose, *Oenothera biennis*, on HWY. 185 at Hodges, SC on August 11, 2003, photographed after 2 p.m. Blooms are from the previous nights, and there are many more buds clustered at the tip.**