

# Giuseppe Monti (1682 – 1760)

Giuseppe Monti, the son of Antonio Monti and Laura Boccalini, was born on 27 November 1682 in Bologna, Italy. As was the custom, he studied Latin literature and philosophy as an adolescent. Then, mainly self-taught, he devoted himself to the study of botany and chemistry as a preliminary to nearly twenty years' practise as an apothecary. His marriage in 1707 to Catarina Furoffi of Forli produced many children, including his son Gaetano Lorenzo Monti (1712–1797), who was to become his helpmate, collaborator and eventually his botanical successor. To hone his pharmaceutical skills, Monti established a home garden and made trips into the Bolognese countryside and alpine foothills to gather medicinal herbs. He also collected minerals, stones, shells and fossils, which became part of the first Italian paleontological collection, the *Musaeum Diluvianum*. He corresponded and shared knowledge, specimens and literature with leading European naturalists of the period, and in 1719 published a catalogue of the Bolognese plants, including the grasses (the plant family most economically useful to man), using a meld of Tournefort's taxonomic system and his own.

Monti's enthusiasm and work did not go unnoticed, and in 1722 he was offered the position of professor of natural history at the new Bologna Institute. This included responsibility for the medicinal plants in the botanic garden and the *ostensiones* (practical demonstrations) conducted there. But a degree was a prerequisite for the positions. Already a member

of the Academy of Sciences, Monti, then 40 years old, was conferred a degree in philosophy on 17 April 1722. The next year he helped his friend Marsili unload and transport to Bologna fourteen bales of natural history items purchased in England and Holland, and later he and his son Gaetano were responsible for exhibiting them at the Institute of Natural History. In about 1736 he was elevated to the teaching position of professor of botany at the University of Bologna, and a few years later to the prestigious post of director of the botanical garden, with its increasing emphasis on exotic plants. Subsequently he was also custodian of the Aldrovandi natural history museum. Moving his residence to a house in the garden enabled him to attend to the rare plants, even after 1752 when, old and in poor health, his official roles had passed to his son. Giuseppe Monti died in Bologna on 4 March 1760, after a stroke.

The Florentine gardener, botanist and mycologist Pier Antonio Micheli (1679–1737), in his *Nova Plantarum Genera* (1729), was the first to use the name *Montia* for a flowering plant, and Linnaeus retained the name in 1753. Publication of Micheli's work would not have been possible without financial support, and each of the 108 copper plates was dedicated to a donor, one of whom was his fellow countryman Giuseppe Monti. It is interesting to note also that Linnaeus named the genus *Michelia* in the plant family Magnoliaceae after Pier Micheli. However, it is now merged with *Magnolia*.



## *Montia erythrophylla*

*Montia* (named after the early Italian botanist Giuseppe Monti) is a widespread genus of some 50 species in the family Montiaceae. All eight New Zealand species reach the alpine zone. *Montia erythrophylla* (formerly *Neopaxia erythrophylla*) is a semi-succulent scree herb, forming loose to compact mats up to 20 cm across. It may be distinguished by its reddish-brown to red, usually dull leaves (hence the specific epithet from the Greek: *erythros* 'red' and *phylon* 'leaf'). The tepals are white in bud, and at maturity usually flushed with pink. *Montia erythrophylla* is confined to the drier mountains of Marlborough and Canterbury, growing usually in sandy or stony debris, semi-stable moist screes and rock outcrops.