

## Pin or thrum

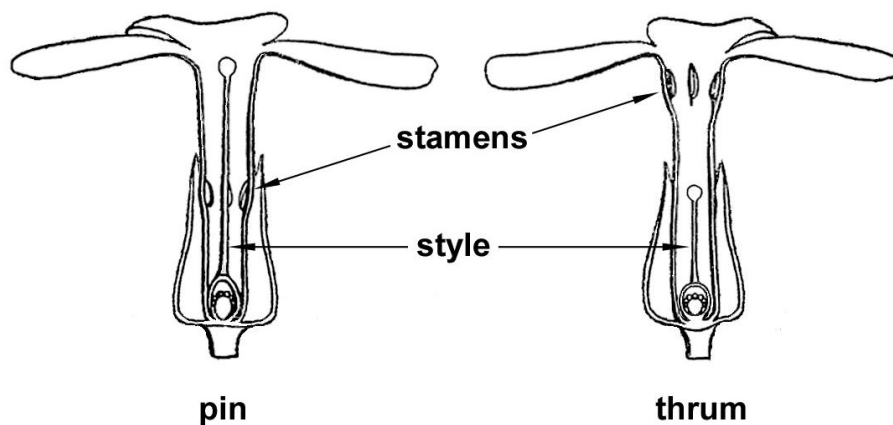
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Botanists know, probably from Botany 101, that primrose flowers come in two forms (heterostyly). To quote from *The Oxford Book of Wild Flowers* (Ary & Gregory 1977: p.26):

"Primroses, cowslips, and oxlips produce two kinds of flower, pin-eyed and thrum-eyed. In the former (Fig. 1 left) the pistil is long-stalked with the stigma visible at the mouth of the tube, and the stamens are attached out of sight lower down the tube. In the thrum-eyed flowers (Fig. 1 right) the pistil is short-stalked and hidden by the stamens which are attached at the top of the tube. This makes self-pollination difficult, but the fact that the pistil of the one type of flower is on a level with the stamens of the other type means that they are touched by the same part of the pollinating bee, and the pollen transferred from the one type to the other, causing cross-pollination."

The reason for the name "pin-eyed" is obvious (Fig. 2), but the word "thrum" had me scratching my head. With a liking for knowing the meaning of words, I looked it up in my *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Sykes 1983: p.1116), and found: "Thrum – fringe of warp-threads remaining on loom when web has been cut off; single thread of this; any loose thread or tuft."

Prior to the Industrial Revolution a loom would have been part of the furniture of many a country cottage. Observant country folk would have known about the two flower forms, and the circle of stamens around the tube of a thrum-eyed flower must have reminded someone of the short threads remaining on a loom when the woven fabric had been cut free, hence "thrum-eyed" (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 1.** Heterostyly in *Primula*. Illustration from Hutchinson (1959, fig. 295), modified by Joshua Salter.



**Figs. 2 & 3.** Two different *Primula x polyanthus* plants, King's Plant Barn, Porana Road, Glenfield, Auckland.  
**2.** Pin-eyed form. **3.** Thrum-eyed form. Photos: Josh Salter, 21 Aug 2015.

### References

- Ary, S.; Gregory, M. 1977: *The Oxford Book of Wild Flowers*. Oxford University Press, CITY.  
Hutchinson, J. 1959, *The families of flowering plants. Vol I: Dicotyledons*. Oxford University Press, London. p.454.  
Sykes, J.B. (Editor) 1983: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford University Press, CITY.