



Language of Flowers

*There is a language, little known,
Lovers claim it as their own.
Its symbols smile upon the land,
Wrought by nature's wondrous hand;
And in their silent beauty speak,
Of life and joy, to those who seek
For Love Divine and sunny hours
In the language of the flowers.*

—The Language of Flowers, London, 1875



The language of flowers has been recognized for centuries in many countries throughout Europe and Asia. They even play a large role in William Shakespeare's works. Mythologies, folklore, sonnets, and plays of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Chinese are peppered with flower and plant symbolism—and for good reason.

Whether you're giving flowers to a mother for Mother's Day, a friend on their birthday, or a beloved on Valentine's Day, nearly every sentiment imaginable can be expressed with flowers. The orange blossom, for instance, means chastity, purity, and loveliness, while the red chrysanthemum means "I love you."

Learning the special symbolism of flowers became a popular pastime during the 1800s. Nearly all Victorian homes had, alongside the Bible, guidebooks for deciphering the “language,” although definitions shifted depending on the source.

Following the protocol of Victorian-era etiquette, flowers were primarily used to deliver messages that couldn’t be spoken aloud. In a sort of silent dialogue, flowers could be used to answer “yes” or “no” questions. A “yes” answer came in the form of flowers handed over with the right hand; if the left hand was used, the answer was “no.”

Plants could also express aversive feelings, such as the “conceit” of pomegranate or the “bitterness” of aloe. Similarly, if given a rose declaring “devotion” or an apple blossom showing “preference,” one might return to the suitor a yellow carnation to express “disdain.”

How flowers were presented and in what condition was important. If the flowers were given upside down, then the conveyed idea was the opposite of what was traditionally meant. How the ribbon was tied said something: Tied to the left, the flowers’ symbolism applied to the giver, whereas tied to the right, the sentiment was in reference to the recipient. Of course, a wilted bouquet delivered an obvious message.

<p>Amaryllis—Pride, pastoral poetry Anemone—Forsaken Aster—Symbol of love, daintiness Azalea—Take care of yourself for me, temperance, fragile passion, Chinese symbol of womanhood Bachelor button—Single blessedness Begonia—Beware Bells-of-Ireland—Good luck Bittersweet—Truth Bluebell—Humility Cactus—Endurance Calla—Beauty Candytuft—Indifference Carnation —Fascination, women love pink—I'll never forget you red—My heart aches for you, admiration purple—Capriciousness white—Sweet and lovely, innocence, pure love, woman's good luck gift solid color—Yes striped—No, refusal</p>	<p>Chrysanthemum red—I love you white—Truth yellow—Slighted love Cleome—Elope with me Coreopsis—Always cheerful Crocus—Cheerfulness Cyclamen—Resignation and good-bye Daffodil—Regard, unequalled love, you're the only one, the sun is always shining when I'm with you (see also: Jonquil, Narcissus) Daisy—Innocence, loyal love, I'll never tell, purity Dandelion—Faithfulness, happiness Daylily—Coquetry, Chinese emblem for mother Evening primrose—Inconstancy Fern—Magic, fascination, confidence and shelter Maidenhair Fern—Secret bond of love Forget-me-not—True love, memories Forsythia—Anticipation Gardenia—secret love</p>	<p>Heather lavender—Admiration, solitude white—Protection, wishes will come true Hellebore—Tranquilize my anxiety Hibiscus—Delicate beauty Hyacinth—Games and sports, rashness blue—Constancy purple—I am sorry, please forgive me, sorrow red—Play white—Loveliness, I'll pray for you yellow—Jealousy Hydrangea—Thank you for understanding, Iris—Your friendship means so much to me Jonquil—Love me, affection returned Larkspur (pink)—Fickleness Lilac—Old love Lily (see also: Tiger Lily) orange—Hatred white—Virginity, purity, majesty, it's heavenly to be with you yellow—I'm walking on air, false and gay</p>	<p>Lily-of-the-valley—Sweetness, tears of the Virgin Mary, return to happiness, humility, you've made my life complete Magnolia—Nobility Marigold—Cruelty, grief, jealousy Mistletoe—Kiss me, affection Mock orange—Deceit Monkshood—Beware, a deadly foe is near Moss—Maternal love, charity Myrtle—Love, Hebrew emblem of marriage Narcissus—Egotism, formality, stay as sweet as you are (see also: Daffodil, Jonquil) Nasturtium—Conquest, victory in battle Orange blossom—Innocence, eternal love, marriage, and fruitfulness Orchid—Love, beauty, refinement, beautiful lady, Chinese symbol for many children</p>
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<p>Peony—Shame, happy life, happy marriage Petunia—Resentment, anger, your presence soothes me Pine—Hope, pity Poppy—Eternal sleep, oblivion, imagination red—Pleasure white—Consolation yellow—Wealth, success Primrose—I can't live without you Rosebud— Beauty and you, a heart innocent of love red—Pure and lovely white—Girlhood moss—Confessions of love</p>	<p>Rose pink—Perfect happiness, please believe me red—Love, I love you dark crimson—Mourning yellow—Decrease of love, jealousy, try to care white—Innocence and purity, I am worthy of you, you're heavenly, secrecy and silence white and red mixed—Unity, flower emblem of England white, dried—Death is preferable to loss of virtue white, withered—Transient impression, fleeting beauty, you made no impression tea—I'll remember always damask—Persian ambassador of love thornless—Love at first sight leaf—You may hope bouquet of mature blooms—Gratitude</p>	<p>Snapdragon—Deception, gracious lady Stephanotis—Happiness in marriage, desire to travel Stock—Bonds of affection, promptness, you'll always be beautiful to me Sweetpea—Good-bye, departure, blissful pleasure, thank you for a lovely time Tiger lily—Wealth, pride (see also: Lily) Tulip—Perfect lover, fame, flower emblem of Holland red—Believe me, declaration of love yellow—There's sunshine in your smile variegated—Beautiful eyes</p>	<p>Violet—Modesty blue—Watchfulness, faithfulness, I'll always be there Wisteria—Will you dance with me? Zinnia magenta—Lasting affection provider mixed—Thinking (or in memory) or an absent friend scarlet—Constancy white—Goodness</p>
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