

# Tom's Garden

## Blog January 2021

### The Language of Flowers

Floriography (language of flowers) is a means of communication through the use or arrangement of flowers. The meanings of certain flowers have been used in cultures throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa for hundreds of years.

William Shakespeare described meanings to flowers, especially in *Hamlet*. Interest in floriography soared in Victorian England and in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Gifts of blooms, plants, and specific floral arrangements were used to send a coded message to the recipient. This allowed the sender to express feelings which could not be spoken aloud in polite Victorian society. Victorians often exchanged small bouquets called nosegays or tussie-mussies. One of the ways a young man could let young ladies know he was “unattached” was to place a certain blue flower discreetly into the buttonhole of his jacket. The flower then became known as bachelor’s buttons. This is certainly more refined than online dating.

Nearly every flower or plant had more than one meaning. The appearance or behavior of a plant can also have meaning. For example, the mimosa, or sensitive plant

represents chastity. This is because the leaves of the mimosa close at night or when touched. The deep, red rose symbolizes the intensity of romantic love while pink roses imply lesser affection. White roses suggest virtue and chastity, and yellow roses stand for friendship or devotion. The black rose (actually dark purple or maroon) has long been associated with death and dark magic.

### Birth-Month Flower

The Romans started the practice of celebrating birth and birthdays using flowers. Seasonal flowers were used as gifts and probably started the tradition of birth month flowers.



Snowdrop

What are the January birth flowers for us? The traditional January birth flowers are the carnation and the snowdrop. The carnation comes in several different colors, which have different meanings, just like roses.

The snowdrop used to be considered bad luck because it always seemed to grow in graveyards. Now, this delicate flower is one of the first to poke through the snow in late winter. It signifies hope and beauty.

## Carnation colors and meanings

Light red.....Admiration

Dark red.....Deep love

White.....Innocence, pure love,  
remembrance

Pink.....A mother's love, affection

Purple.....capriciousness

Yellow.....Disappointment, rejection

Striped(any color).....regret

As you can see, it's not just affection and condolences that can be conveyed by flowers. You can use flowers for a pep talk, to show your displeasure, or simply to say "I'm thinking of you."

Just imagine what your flower bed is saying all summer long!

## Native Bees

An increase in housing allotments and business expansion has not been very good for most wildlife. One surprising thing that has happened in modern cityscapes and homeowners' back yards is the success of native bees such as bumblebees and mason bees.

Studies have found that native bee colonies in urban and suburban areas fare better than in rural areas that support monoculture crops such as corn and soybeans. Some crops grown in monoculture fashion are genetically modified to be "round-up-ready," meaning that herbicide can be sprayed directly on that crop with no effect but killing all other vegetation.

This practice is devastating to bee populations that rely on native plants such as goldenrod for pollen and nectar. There is much less plant diversity in rural farm areas than can be found in cities. Urban and suburban gardeners plant a wide variety of ornamental plants that provide nectar and protection for native pollinators.

Exposure to pesticides used in farming leads to colony collapse in bee populations. While city gardeners also use some pesticides, their use is not nearly as widespread as in farming. Ornamental trees and plants give the bees nectar and pollen throughout the season as opposed to a one-time crop.

### **What can we do to help our pollinators?**

Help bees directly by planting a wide range of pollinator-friendly flowers such as lavender, hyssop, mint, hollyhocks, dahlias, sweet peas and foxgloves. Try to plan your garden so flowers are continuously blooming all season long. Flowering trees are good, especially early in the season before flowers are in bloom. Limit the use of bee-harming pesticides. Plant "single" varieties of flowers rather than double. Single flowers offer food for pollinators. Let dandelions and clover grow in your lawn. The bees will thank you for it. Above all, go outdoors and enjoy the space you have created for butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds.

## Earth Star Bromeliad

Earth Star bromeliad (*Cryptanthus bivittatus*) makes a carefree, easy houseplant. Earth Star bromeliads are easy-to-grow houseplants with very few demands. They have a wide range of colors, compact habit and slow growth.



**Exposure:** Bright indirect light

**Season:** All year for foliage

**Foliage:** The earth star gets its common name from the rosette of stiff, pointed, overlapping leaves. The leaves can range in color from reds, pinks, shades of green, and white or colorful stripes.

*Cryptanthus* originates from the rain forests of Brazil, where they inhabit the forest floor.

Pot these plants up using a fertile, moisture-retaining potting mix. They like humid conditions so try to increase humidity around them and mist with a spray bottle occasionally. Direct sun will scorch the leaves, but they like bright light. They are not cold hardy but can be moved onto the patio or deck for the summer.

## An herb garden is good for your health

Anytime that you can grow food at home it will be healthier than the food you can buy in the grocery store. Food from the grocery store is always at least a few days old, if not more by the time you get it. Once herbs are harvested, they begin to lose nutritional value. The herbs will retain some of their flavor and some of their nutritional value, but it's not the same as a fresh plant.

Herbs have been in the spotlight lately as scientists learn more about how herbs can be used for your health. Herbs like lavender and chamomile are relaxing. Peppermint has been shown to fight off colds. Lemon balm can boost your mood, especially when brewed as tea.

Research has shown that growing plants indoors can help relieve stress, decrease anxiety and ward off depression. (I talk to my plants, don't you?).

Those bundles of herbs sold at the grocery store have a short shelf life and have lost a lot of their potency. Instead of buying herbs at the grocery, spend that money to buy what you need to grow your own herbs.

You can buy herb seeds to start in potting soil or buy small herb plants to grow on a sunny windowsill. Basil, parsley, rosemary and thyme are good plants to start with and enjoy being "snipped" often. Don't overwater and let the soil dry out between waterings.

