



Say It with Flowers
By Kate Halvorson
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

The English Victorian era lasted from 1830 until the early 1900's and was known for its staunch societal rules and high moral standards. This was also a period of intense interest in natural history, and horticulture flourished as Victorians created gardens galore. Kitchen herb and vegetable gardens, colorful cottage gardens, and formal gardens with "glass houses" (greenhouses) were made to collect and display wide varieties of plants and flowers, both native and exotic.

Another interesting Victorian custom was assigning symbolic meanings to specific plants and flowers. Flower dictionaries contained the wide range of human emotions: love, grief, courtship, loneliness, and distrust - each emotion associated with its own unique flower or plant. Strict rules may have prevented people from openly expressing romantic interest in another, for example, but it was socially acceptable to convey emotions by sending flowers that contained floral "coded" messages. The recipient could send flowers back as their response too, representing mild interest, passion, or rebuke.

On Valentine's Day, when many of us give or receive flowers, we can look back at the custom of saying things through flowers, and perhaps discover hidden meanings in our Valentine's bouquet.

Roses (*Rosa*) are the foremost symbol of love, but oh, so many roses in different colors, all to convey diverse meanings. Red and white roses are for love, pink denotes grace, purple means enchanting, and orange is fascination. Consider the yellow rose carefully, for it has multiple meanings from friendship to jealousy and infidelity.

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Carnations (*Dianthus*), another popular flower, were originally a wild plant that the English cultivated in a variety of colors. Red carnations are a strong expression of love, or heartbreak. Pink means I won't forget you, white means sweet or lovely, and striped carnations say I can't be with you. Yellow carnations weren't the best to receive, for they mean disdain.

Baby's-breath (*Gypsophila elegans*), used as bouquet "filler," mean everlasting love. Orchids (*Orchis*) are for grace, or refined beauty. Chrysanthemum stands for truth, Dahlias upon their tall stalks represent dignity, and Pansy is think of me. The Daisy means innocence: who doesn't remember the childhood game plucking off flower petals one at a time, "he loves me, he loves me not" and the last petal picked dictated one's romantic fate?

Many springtime flowers carry "hopeful" meanings: Snowdrop (*Galanthus*) for consolation (winter is almost done) and hope. Daffodil (*Narcissus*) for new beginnings, and Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*) in many colors: blue - constancy, purple - forgive me, and white - beauty.

Interesting to note that our state flower, Poppy (*Papaver*), stands for fantastic extravagance. The Victorians admired the poppy as a quiet flower that stays tightly closed until sunshine pops buds open with silky, brightly colored petals of orange, yellow and red. After a few days of colorful bloom, the poppy fades fast, making it a flower that perhaps leaves a quick, but lasting, impression.

Mandy Kirkby's *A Victorian Flower Dictionary* is a wonderful resource to learn more about the specific meaning and symbolism of many flowers and plants. For a beautifully-written novel about the modern-day meaning of flowers, check out California author Vanessa Diffenbaugh's *The Language of Flowers*.

As you ponder flower messages this Valentine's Day, remember our good fortune to live in the Sierra Nevada foothills where many flowering plants thrive. If you're looking for ways to add color to your landscape, plan a visit to the El Dorado County Master Gardeners' Sherwood Demonstration Garden this spring to see hundreds of colorful plants that grow locally. The garden is located behind Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center and will re-open to the public after April 1 on Fridays and Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to noon.

The upcoming public education class, "Backyard Chickens," will be presented by Master Gardener Heidi Napier on February 24, 9:00 a.m. to noon at Government Center, Bldg C Hearing Room, Placerville. Learn all there is to know about raising your own chickens!

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.