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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian The Language of Flowers

By Cynthia Brian



A boastful message of magnificent beauty and heartlessness with the magenta hydrangea and white calla lily. Photos Cynthia Brian

Gallantry, happiness, purity, fidelity, and marriage were the unspoken words voiced from the shield-shaped bouquet of Kate Middleton as she wed Prince William at Westminster Abbey. The ivy symbolized marriage, the myrtle fidelity, lily-of-the-valley was happiness and purity, and sweet William meant gallantry, a quite fitting combination for a royal roundup.

Flowers have a language all their own. Although floriography, the language of flowers, may be a dying form of coded communication, there is a simplicity and beauty in expressing oneself through the flowers, herbs, and plants that we grow in our Lamorinda gardens.

Rooted in ancient traditions, flowers have been used throughout the ages as an informal messaging system. In Greece, bridesmaids created posies as thank you gifts from nature for the bride, groom, and families. Historical journals indicate that Anthony and Cleopatra consummated their love on a bed of roses. In the 17th century, illiterate Turkish concubines communicated with one another by giving meaning to various flowers and sharing the blossoms. Europeans became fascinated with the idea when writer Lady Mary Wortley, the woman who introduced the Turkish inoculation (variola) against smallpox into the Western

medicine, and wife of the British Ambassador to Constantinople wrote about her discovery of a "secret language of flowers" between the women of the Ottoman Empire. *Le Language des Fleurs*, a small reference book, was published in 1819 by Louise Cortambert, under the nom de plume, Madame Charlotte de la Tour, and became the popular tome of the time. From 1837-1901, during the reign of Queen Victoria of England, a time of puritanical propriety, the language of flowers flourished. Floriography was a discreet and simpler method to "say it with flowers" than with words.

Nosegays (fragrant flowers to keep the nose happy), posies (small bouquets of sweet smelling flowers worn around the head or bodice), tussie-mussies (symbolic flower fashion accessories wrapped in lace and tied with satin ribbon) and sachets (perfumed bags) are as appropriate in the 21st century as they were in the 19th.

June is the most popular month for weddings. Calla lilies, asters, roses, forget-me-nots, gardenias, orchids, jasmine, peony, ivy, and violets are colorful cryptograms to ensure a long, loving, happy marriage. June is also the season of graduations and Father's Day whereby a mixed bouquet of sunflowers for congratulations, basil for best wishes, white bellflowers for gratitude, heather for admiration, sage for wisdom, and fern for sincerity may be the vocabulary of choice.

-Whenever you want to speak to someone without talking, take a walk around your garden to find the perfect floral words. I have created a simplified flower-speak dictionary of my favorite flowers, herbs, trees, and blossoms growing in my garden culled from years of gardening lore to help you plant the sensations you wish to express in your next bouquet. Whether you want to express appreciation, love, sympathy, friendship, or fascination, there is a plant to help you share your feelings and express explicit emotions.

PLANT	MEANING
Allium	Patience
Almond	Hope
Alstroemeria	Friendship
Amaranth	Immortality
Amaryllis	Pride
Anemone	Forsaken
Angelica	Inspiration
Anthurium	Heartfelt
Artemisia	Power
Aster	Love
Astilbe	I'm Waiting
Bachelor Button	Celibacy

Basil	Success
Bay Leaf	Faithfulness
Bell Flower	Gratitude
Black-Eyed Susan	Justice
Borage	Courage
Buttercup	Money
Bleeding Heart	Elegance
Caladium	Delight
Calendula	Remembrance
Calla Lily	Magnificent Beauty
Camellia	Excellence
Carnation (striped)	Regrets
Carnation (white)	Remember Me
Cherry blossoms	Chivalry
Chrysanthemum	Optimism
Clematis	Ingenuity
Coreopsis	Love at First Sight
Coral Bells	Challenge
Daffodil	Respect
Dahlia	Dignity
Daisy	Friendship
Euphorbia	Welcome
Fern	Sincerity
Forget-Me-Not	True Love
Freesia	Innocence
Gardenia	Ecstasy
Gladiolus	Generosity
Heather	Dreams and Wishes come true
Hemlock	Death
Hyacinth	Forgiveness
Hydrangea	"Boastful, Heartless"
Iris	A Message for You
Ivy	"Fidelity, Friendship, Marriage"
Jasmine	Grace
Jonquil	"Wisdom, Return my Affection"
Lambs Ear	Surprise
Larkspur (Delphinium)	Freedom
Lavender	Good Luck
Lemon Balm	Sympathy
Lilac	First Love
Lily	Modesty
Lily-of-the-Valley	Purity
Magnolia	Perseverance
Marigold (French)	Jealousy
Mint	Virtue
Mistletoe	Kisses and Love
Mock Orange	Brotherly Love
Moss	Maternal Love
Myrtle	Fidelity
Narcissus	Self-Esteem
Nasturtium	Patriotism
Oak	Strength
Oleander	Beware
Olive	Peace
Orchid	"Love, nobility, refinement"
Pansy	Loving thoughts

Parsley	Festivity and Thanks
Peony	"Health, Wealth, Happiness"
Periwinkle	Pleasant Memories
Phlox	Agreement
Poppy (red)	"Consolation, Rest, Sleep"
Queen Anne's Lace	Protection
Rhododendron	Warning
Rose (colors determine sentiment)	"Love, Friendship, Grace"
Rosemary	Remembrance
Sage	Hospitality
Snapdragons	Desire
Spruce	Farewell
St. John's Wort	Protection
Stock	Promptness
Sunflower	Congratulations
Sweet Pea	"Departure, Sweet Memory"
Sweet William	Gallantry
Thistle	Austerity
Thyme	Bravery
Tuberose	Voluptuousness
Tulip	Fame
Verbena	Sensibility
Violet	Simplicity
Wallflower	Loneliness
Wisteria	Daughter's Sweetness
Yarrow	Healing
Yew	Sorrow
Zinnia	Thoughts of Lost Friends

Depending on the source, there may be multiple meanings for the same specimen, sometimes with completely opposing connotations. Color and number of stems may also weigh into the interpretation for the recipient, especially when it comes to the rose, which enjoys the status of the plant with the most definitions. For example, a red rose implies passionate love, whereas a crimson rose indicates mourning. A fresh white rose speaks of innocence and purity while a dried white rose denotes "death is preferable to loss of virtue!" The significance of giving ten roses signifies that "you are perfect", thirteen roses means "friends forever", fifteen roses says "I'm truly sorry", twenty-four roses kisses with "forever yours" whereas twenty five roses signs "congratulations." Perhaps it would be wise to count properly as we wouldn't want to confuse those numbers and import the incorrect gist. If you are contemplating a marriage proposal, 108 red roses on a bended knee whispers, "Will you marry me?"

Whether it's Happy Birthday, I Love You, Get Well Soon, Sincerest Condolences, Thank You, Forgive Me, or Just Because, Mother Nature provides the verdant language. With the language of flowers you can have an entire conversation without uttering a word!

CYNTHIA BRIAN'S GARDENING GUIDE FOR JUNE

"Summer afternoon -- summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." Henry James

School is winding to a close, the days are getting longer, and we are all itching for the summer time hues. It's time to spruce up the patio, fire up the barbecue, and start living in our dressed up outdoor spaces. The longest day of the year occurs on June 21st, the summer solstice, as the sun "stands still" while the earth begins to tilt away. Our roses shine in their prime releasing their sweet fragrance onto the hands that pluck them. Herbal concoctions make great iced-teas and tonic elixirs, and our mixed greens are ready to be tossed as a fresh, crisp salad. Put out the welcome mat! It's hammock time.

- SPRUCE up your patio furniture with a coat of paint or lacquer.
- POWERWASH your brick, concrete, driveway, and deck to rid them of the winter mold and moss.
- REPOT plants that have outgrown their containers. Choose one or two sizes larger, add new potting soil, being careful to separate the roots, and water thoroughly.
- REPEL the hungry deer and rabbits with frequent reapplications of organic repellents available at your favorite garden center.
- COOK up your pea shoots, beet tops, sorrel, and bean blossoms for a tasty tendril treat.
- MAINTAIN your weeding regimen. Pull weeds by hand before they go to seed. Using a mechanical weed eater spreads the weed seeds.
- FILL birdbaths with fresh water weekly providing our feathered friends with their own private lake.

- SNIP the blossoms of bee balm, chamomile, and lavender for a tangy tea. Hot or iced, every delicious sip is loaded with nutritious health benefits.
- READ labels when fertilizing. Overfeeding breeds weaker growth.
- ADD rose petals to your salads, desserts, and bath water.
- PRUNE dead palm fronds. You may need to hire a tree service if the limbs are taller than the ladders and extenders you have.
- TOSS your mistakes on the compost pile. Remember failure is fertilizer.
- SPRINKLE crushed eggshells onto your soil. They repel snails, slugs, and cutworms while being a great organic fertilizer.
- CLEAN up the final dried leaves from your spring blooming bulbs. If the foliage is still green, don't cut them

back

until they are brown and crackling as they are still photosynthesizing nutrients for next year's show stopping season.

- WATCH your landscape for necessary watering needs. Containers require a daily drink. Water lawns in the early morning to eliminate insect infestation.
- EXPERIMENT with floriography, the language of flowers, by designing a personalized tussey-mussey.
- COZY up to your outdoor fireplace or buy a portable fire pit for those chilly Lamorinda summer nights.
- EXPLORE a local garden, take a trail walk, pack a picnic with juicy fruit you grow. Purple plums ripen by June

22.

- PREPARE for fire season by clearing brush, limbs, grass, and weeds from the perimeter of your home and fence.

- SUPPLEMENT your outdoor rooms with spectacular hanging baskets of ferns, fuchsias, verbena or lobelia.
- EXPERIENCE a new shade shrub in your garden. How about adding a blueberry plant for its year round

beauty

and anti-oxidant rich produce?

- CELEBRATE the summer solstice on June 21st with a roaring bonfire,



A summer hanging basket of fuscshia and violet hued verbena looks perfect on the patio.



Sunflowers are the perfect flower for the graduate as they shout "Congratulations!"



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