

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Century plant in Lafayette ... read on page D7

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

The Language of Flowers

“Flowers are Love’s truest language!” Park Benjamin



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-tion) 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.

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