

Herbal Treasures for Special Occasions

Herbs have been essential to the language of love for centuries, used profusely in adorning bridal couples as well as bridal chambers. Ancient Athenians wove mint and marigolds, which they believed to be aphrodisiacs, into bridal garlands and wreaths. Roman brides carried wheat for fertility and myrtle for long life. European brides in the Middle Ages carried pungent herbs such as garlic and chives to prevent jealous spirits from disrupting the couple's happiness. Victorian brides carefully chose a combination of herbs that expressed their sentiments and hopes—perhaps roses for love, lavender for devotion, pansies for happy thoughts, and marjoram for joy.

Herbs are especially appropriate for weddings because they bring centuries of tradition, loving sentiments for the couple and wonderful—some say therapeutic fragrances. If conditioned properly, they hold up well and they are versatile enough to add a special touch to everything from the guest book to the dessert plates. Herbs can be understated or elegant, equally suited for the most modest of ceremonies or the most extravagant reception.

The Language of Herbs

Herbs, as well as flowers and trees have possessed symbolic meaning since classical times, but the idea that flowers could form a language was first introduced into England by Lady Mary Wortley Montague, during a visit to Turkey in 1716. She wrote in a letter to England, “You may quarrel, reproach, or send letters of passion, friendship, or civility, or even news without inking your fingers.”

Expressing our deepest feelings through a carefully prepared bouquet of flowers and herbs seems a very romantic gesture. Often they can speak far more eloquently than words, and as a means of conveying love or sorrow there is no more beautiful a language. Symbolic meanings have been attributed to flowers, trees and herbs in both the East and West since early Roman times. The most famous example is the white lily, *Lilium candidum*, or Madonna lily. Frequently depicted in paintings in the hands of the Virgin Mary, it symbolizes purity and chastity to this day. Likewise, love has long been represented by the rose. Early painters often included specific flowers, trees or herbs in their work, not only for their beauty but also because they conveyed a meaning that complemented the painting as a whole.

In the seventeenth century many women carried little posies of sweet-smelling flowers and herbs—called tussie mussies—to ward off unpleasant smells and even the plague. These posies had meanings too. The Elizabethans and Victorians attributed meanings to almost every plant, and books abounded on the subject, each claiming to have the most entries and the most up-to-date meanings. As many “Experts” disagreed on some of the meanings, this resulted in some flowers symbolizing more than one quality.... making it rather hard or perhaps more interesting to decipher the bouquets message!

Here are a list of some of the Herbs along with their “meanings”:

Angelica....forsaken	Cornflowers...celibacy
Bay.....glory	Calendula....health, joy
Clove Pinksresignation	Dill.....good spirits
Fennel.....flattery	Lemon-Scented Geranium....unexpected meeting
Hollyhock.....ambition	Hyssop.....sacrifice
Lamb's Ear.....support	Lavender.....devotion, undying love, luck, distrust (??)
Lemon Verbena....unity	Marjoram.....blushes, joy
Mint.....wisdom	Myrtle.....love, fidelity, married bliss
Oregano.....joy, happiness	Parsley.....rejoice, festivity
Rose.....red-passion, love; pink-beauty, grace; white-unity, respect, innocence; yellow-jealousy	Rue.....grief
Rosemary.....remembrance	Sunflower....hautiness
Sage...domestic virtue, long life	Yarrow....war, everlasting love (???)
Violet.....modesty	

Collecting Plant Material:

Pick herbs early in the morning, when they contain the most water and are less likely to wilt after cutting. Cut stems at a 45° angle with a sharp blade, as bruising them can reduce water uptake. Remove any foliage that will be under water. Always use clean containers to minimize bacterial contamination. Keep completed floral arrangements in a cool location out of direct sunlight, mist them occasionally to prevent wilting.

Conditioning Plant Material:

To prepare herbs so that they will hold up in flower arrangements, immediately plunge freshly cut stalks into a container of water at room temperature, then leave them in it in a cool place or overnight. Commercial floral preservatives or bleach may increase longevity, but are not suitable if the herbs may be eaten later. Herbs conditioned without preservatives will last about a week.

Herbs for foliage & greenery :

Basil, Parsley, Rosemary, Lavender, Santolina, Wormwood, Woolly Lamb's Ear, Eucalyptus, Sage, Mints
Lemon Verbena, Lemon Grass, Sweet Woodruff, Fennel-Sweet or Bronze, Chives, Ivy

Herbs for flowers:

Echinacea, Roses, Common Marjoram, Thyme, Sunflower, Clove Pinks, Cornflower, Calendula, Violets, Nasturtium, Mallows, Hollyhock, Bergamot, Lavender, Valerian, Hyssop, Sweet Woodruff, Anise
Hyssop, Heather, Yarrow, Feverfew

Herbs for Scent:

Mints, Thymes, Sages, Lemon Verbena, Sweet Marjoram, Savory, Tarragon, Rosemary, Lavender, Hyssop, Wormwood, Sweet Woodruff, Oregano, Lemon Balm, Lemon Grass, Dill

Here are few suggestions for combining herbs with other flowers and plant materials, to create beautiful, fragrant and meaningful arrangements for any occasion.

Boutonniere or Small Corsage: Wonderful fragrant keepsake for all your special occasions!

Choose herbs and flowers either for their colour, texture, aroma or for their meaning. Arrange greenery, using an odd number of 4" stems then place 1 large flower (like a rose) or 3 smaller flowers (like lavender or thyme) on top of greenery. Using florist tape secure all stems together, then trim ends, cover with a ribbon or rafia bow and insert pin where tape is. Keep fresh by placing in a plastic bag and storing in a cool place or in the fridge, mist occasionally to keep from wilting. After the event they can be dried in a warm dark location for a keepsake. For Weddings-Use similar small bunches to attach to wine glasses, cake cutting knives, guest book pen or to decorate the wedding cake etc., etc.

Herbal Bouquet: Use herbs and flowers to create a visual and aromatic masterpiece.

Immerse a floral foam bouquet holder in water for at least 1 hour.

Establish the arrangements basic size and shape with greenery, then add flowering stems. To achieve a cascading effect, place long herb stems such as rosemary and pineapple mint in front. Then add shorter stems of the same herbs as well as others such as sage and florists lemon leaf-salal, to create a rounded appearance.

Next add the main focal flowers (roses, carnations, echinacea etc.). Use an odd number, it's visually more appealing, and distribute them evenly throughout the bouquet. Place more open flowers near the center and let the more tightly closed buds cascade toward the floor. Now add a few sprigs of feverfew, lavender, baby's breath distributed evenly as accents. Finally, tie long ribbon streamers to a 6" piece of wire and poke it into the foam. Love knots can also be tied in the ribbons-simple overhand knots (Believed to keep the love from running out of a marriage and hold in all the guest's wishes for the couple.)

The bouquet may be made a day ahead, keep cool and mist occasionally.

Edible Centerpieces: Simple and easy, but sure to be noticed!

Use any kind of edible vegetable with a firm shell, that will stand upright. (peppers, cucumbers) Trim bottom so it is flat if necessary

Hollow out the insides, removing seeds etc. but leaving shell/skin intact.

Fill ¾ full with water and arrange herbs and edible flowers

Suggested herbs-basil, marjoram, dill, coriander, mint,parsley, sage, chives, garlic scapes, perilla etc.

Suggested edible flowers -cornflowers, calendula, mallows, chamomile, clove pinks, chive blossoms,etc.

Place on a saucer or other plate for stability.

Punch Bowl Ring-festive and decorative for any occasion from a garden party to a wedding

Soak a 15" fresh floral foam ring in water for 1-2 hours, then place on a large tray-this makes it easy to transport and you can water it if necessary. Cut 4 inch sprigs of mint, rosemary, lemon verbena or other available herbs and stick randomly into the foam. When it is fairly filled in add 5-6inch stems of flowers such as Echinacea or Begamot, keeping the overall arrangement symmetrical. Add about a dozen 4" long sprigs of accents such as feverfew or baby's breath.

When complete, place punch bowl in centre for a spectacular centerpeice.

Herbal Topiary-a real conversation piece when they figure out what was used!

Materials

Clay pot for base (or other suitable container)

1 brick of fresh floral foam, divided

gravel-to weight down base pot

bathroom plunger-large or small

moss-1 bag should do

5-6 greenery pins

2 rubber bands

vine-such as ivy to wind around handle

assortment of fresh herb cuttings (15-20)-rosemary, lavender, thyme, savory, etc.

12-15 flowers-roses, daisies, echinacea, sunflowers, carnations etc.

Directions:

Wedge ½ of floral foam into base container and pack with gravel for stability.

Insert plunger handle into centre of foam, push down firmly. (Cut handle if too tall to be in porportion with base)

Dampen moss and use it to cover foam in base, secure with greenery pins.

Place ¼ of the foam in the cup of the plunger, dampen the moss and let sit until pliable

Cover rubber cup of plunger and foam completely with dampened moss. Secure moss in place with rubber bands placed on opposite sides and stretched up and over the top.

Moisten the floral foam in the base container, which is now covered with moss. Insert lower end of vine (ivy) into the foam and wind loosely up the plunger handle and secure into moss at the top with wire or string if necessary

Moisten the floral foam in the plunger cup and begin arranging flowers and herbs. Begin with the herb cuttings and let some droop over the edge. Fill in, but do not overpack, keep it loose. Then intersperse with the flowers throughout. Don't push the stems to far into the foam; you want the flowers to show through the herbs. Finish the arrangement with baby's breath or statice.

*Be creative-you can make this look very globular and formal or wispy and free flowing depending on the herbs and flowers used. You can also include berries, cones or dried peppers...just go for it!

Compliments of:

KETTLEBY HERB FARMS

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THE LANGUAGE OF HERBS

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