The Language of Flowers

Send a friend (or enemy!) a secret message without writing a word. Small nosegays of flowers and herbs deliver messages of love, courage, forgiveness or remembrance based on the plants they contain.

Talking Bouquets

A tussie-mussie is a small circular nosegay of flowers and herbs designed to carry a special message.

History

The word tussie-mussie is derived from Elizabethan times, 'tumose of flowrys or other herbys'. Bouquets included thyme, lavender, marjoram, mints, balms, rosemary and chamomile for fragrance and the belief that they refreshed the head and stimulated memory. Judges carried tussie-mussies into their courtrooms to protect against "gaol fever." Tussie-mussies of aromatic herbs were carried close to the nose to combat unpleasant odors in the streets and the 'bad air' that was believed to cause the plague.

Victorians turned the practice of flower giving and carrying into an art. Floral dictionaries listed meanings for each flower and herb, adapted from classical mythology, religious symbolism, ancient lore, and the authors’ creativity. Tussie-mussies were popular as fashion accessories, complete with elaborate silver holders. Suitors would give tussie-mussies to their beloveds; ladies were well versed in interpretations, but the double meanings of some herbs and flowers undoubtedly led to misunderstandings!

Using Tussie-Mussies Today

Make a personalized gift by crafting a tussie-mussie of flowers for a special occasion or to bring cheer to someone who is unwell. Certain scents help to relax, others sharpen concentration; colors can soothe or enliven. Use your combination of flowers and herbs to create a specific mood or send a personalized message.

Plants and their Meanings

angelica inspiration
apple temptation
baby's breath pure heart
bachelor's button celibacy
basil love, good wishes, also hatred
bay glory
belladonna silence
betony surprise
birch meekness
bluebell constancy
borage courage and bluntness
box stoicism
broom arder or humility
bugloss falsehood
burdock touch me not
buttercup promise of riches
calendula sunny disposition
california poppy do not refuse me
carnation pure love, admiration
chamomile energy in adversity
cedar strong, incorruptible
chervil sincerity
chickweed rendezvous
chicory frugality
chrysanthemum cheerfulness
clematis filial love
clover (4 leaf) happiness
coltsfoot justice shall be done
columbine folly
coriander hidden worth
cowslip pensive, winning grace
crocus youthful gladness (brief joy)
daisy innocence
daffodil regret
dandelion oracle
dusty miller felicity
elder zealous
evening primrose inconstancy, uncertainty
fennel worthy of praise, strength
fern fascination
flax sincerity
clover domestic industry
true love
Language of Flowers continued

MAKING TUSSIE-MUSSIES

Start with a single flower, usually a rose, but any good-sized, pretty specimen will work (hydrangea, geranium, daisy, gardenia, etc.). Surround the flower with a green herb, preferably one with small leaves. Bind the stems together tightly with a piece of string or florist tape.

Surround the herb layer with a ring of flowers, then add another layer of herb leaves or flowers and bind again.

Repeat the circles of layers, binding all together as you go, until the tussie-mussie is the size you want. The final layer should be of larger leaves to frame the nosegay.

Cut the stems evenly. The nosegay will keep in water for up to a week. You may also cut a small hole in the center of a paper doily or square of lace and place behind the last row of leaves. Add a ribbon.

- foxglove: insincerity
- gardenia: estacy
- geranium, red: comfort, health
- geranium, scented: preference
- hawthorn: hope
- harebell: grief
- heliotrope: faithfulness
- holly: domestic happiness
- hollyhock: ambition
- honesty: sincerity
- honeysuckle: fidelity
- hops: injustice
- hosta: devotion
- houseleek: vivacity, domestic energy
- hyssop: cleanliness
- hydrangea: devotion
- ivy: fidelity, wedded love
- Jacob's ladder: descend
- jasmine: amiability
- juniper: protection
- lady's mantle: softness, gentleness
- lamb's ears: purity, modesty
- lavender: lock, forgiveness, devotion
- laurel: victory
- lemon balm: sympathy
- lilac: first emotions
- lily, white: purity, modesty
- lily of the valley: return of happiness
- lime blossom: conjugal love
- linden: marriage
- love-lies-bleeding: hopelessness
- lupine: dejection
- marigold – African: vulgar minds
- marigold – French: jealousy
- marjoram: blushes, happiness
- marshmallow: beneficence
- meadowsweet: usefulness
- mignonette: qualities surpass your charms
- mint: virtue
- moss rose: superior merit
- motherwort: concealed love
- mugwort: happiness
- nasturtium: patriotism
- olive: peace
- orange blossom: chastity
- pansy: tender pleasant thoughts
- parsley: festivity
- passion flower: religious fervor
- pennyroyal: fleecy away
- peppermint: warmth of feeling
- pinks: loyalty, longevity, friendship
- poppy: perfection
- rocket: sleep and dreams
- rose, white: early youth
- rose, pink: rivalry
- rose, red: passion
- rose, yellow: infidelity
- rose, full blown: secrecy
- rosemary: remembrance
- rue: grace, repentance
- salvia, blue: wisdom
- salvia, red: energy
- saffron: marriage and mirth
- sage: esteem, wisdom, domestic virtue
- snapdragon: no
- snowdrop: consolation and hope
- sorrel: affection
- southerwood: joking, bantering
- spearmint: warmth of sentiment
- star-of-Bethlehem: reconciliation
- static: everlasting life
- sweet myrtle: love
- sweet pea: delicate pleasures
- tansy: I declare war, I'm your enemy
- teasel (fuller's): misanthropy
- thyme: courage, bravery
- valerian: an accommodating disposition
- vervain: enchantment
- vine: mirth, intoxication
- violet: faithfulness
- wallflower: fidelity in misfortune
- weeping willow: forsaken
- wild strawberry: perfection
- witch hazel: a spell
- wormwood: absence
- yarrow: war and healing, solace
- yew: sorrow
- zinnia: thoughts of absent friends