

*Hyacinthus*

*Asparagaceae*  
[*Hyacinthaceae*]

*Hyacinthus* is the Greek name for the plant and recalls one of the Greek myths. Hyacinthus, a beautiful mortal young man, was loved not only by Apollo but also Boreas and Zephyrus (the Greek gods of the North and South Winds respectively) which led to a violent end. One day when Hyacinthus and Apollo were tossing the discus back and forth Zephyrus, in jealousy, deflected one of Apollo's throws. Hyacinthus was killed. As the discus struck him on the head a flower sprang out of the gushing blood. While hyacinth is normally taken to be the emerging flower (on whose leaves or petals the distraught Apollo was said to have drawn the letters AI, 'alas'), the legend has also been associated with the iris *Iris* and the gladiolus *Gladiolus*.

For some authorities the myth's association with hyacinth is immortalised in words written by the Portuguese poet Luis de Camoens (1524-1580) when he explains

The hyacinth betrays the doleful 'ai',  
And culls the tribute of Apollo's sigh,  
Still on its bloom the mournful flower retains,  
The lovely blue that dyed the stripling's veins.

Other authorities suspect he may actually have been referring to the martagon lily *Lilium martagon*.

In the language of flowers hyacinth is said to be a symbol of constancy (blue), faith, game, play, prudence, resurrection, sorrow (purple), sport, 'things sorrowful and sad', unobtrusive loveliness (white), wisdom, and woe.