

Rosa

Rosaceae

Rosa is derived for some authorities from Greek *rodon* (red) and for others from Celtic *rhos* (red), and it is a classical Latin name for 'rose'.

ROSE (English, Danish, French, German, Norwegian) is normally a deciduous shrub. It is native to the northern hemisphere, is cultivated worldwide and can reach a height of from 4 in. to 60 ft.

It is also known generally as *Bara* (Japanese), *Bunga ayer mawar* (Malaysian), *Escaramujo* (Spanish), *Gul* (Farsi), *Gül* (Turkish), *Gulab* (Gujarati), *Kulab* (Thai), *Panineer* (Malayalam), *Roos* (Afrikaans, Dutch), *Ros* (Swedish), *Rosa* (Italian, Portuguese, Singhalese, Spanish), *Ruusku* (Finnish), *Ruža* (Slovak), *Tsigéreda* (Ethiopian), *Warda* (Arabic), *Waridi* (Swahili), and *Wered* (Hebrew). In Anglo-Saxon times the fruit of the rose was called *hiope* from which comes the word 'hip'.

In flower language it is said to be a symbol of abstract thought (white), admiration (red), age (Guelder), bashful shame (deep red), beauty (full-blown rose, red-leafed rose, or rosebuds), bliss, blood (red), blushing (red), charming simplicity (wild rose), confession of love (moss rose), death (red rose, rose thorn), 'death in preference to loss of innocence' (dried white rose), 'decrease of love' (yellow), desire (red), early attachment (thornless rose), elegance, embarrassment (deep red), engagement (full blown rose); flame, fragrance, frailty, friendship (yellow), genteel, girlhood (white rosebud), grace (montiflora), happy love (pink rose, bridal rose), 'heart ignorant of love' (white rosebud), hope (rosebud); 'I am in despair' (withered white rose), 'I am true' (Jacqueminot), 'I am worthy of you' (white), 'I am worthy of your love' (white), 'inclined to love' (red rosebud), infidelity (yellow), ingratitude (thornless), innocence (white), innocent love (white), jealousy (yellow), joy; 'let us forget' (yellow), life, love (particularly pink or double red), 'love is dangerous' (Carolina), 'love is waning' (yellow), martyrdom (red), motherhood (red); 'ours must be secret love' (pink), pain (rose thorn), passion (red), perfect achievement (yellow), pleasure, pomp, popular favour (rock rose), praise, prayer, pretty, promise (rosebud), prosperity (red-leafed rose), pure (red rosebud), 'pure and lovely' (red rosebud), purity (rosebuds, white rose); 'reward of virtue' (garland or crown of roses); romantic love (red), 'the sacred heart of Jesus', sacrifice (red), secrecy (rose in full bloom, or blown, over two buds), sensual desire (red), shame (red), silence (white), simplicity (pink rose, or single rose), a star, superior (moss rose), the sun; timid love (half blown rose); 'too young to love' (white rosebud), transient impression (withered white rose); unity (red rose and white rose together); virginity (white rose); wine, Winter (Guelder), wisdom, woman; 'you are all that is lovely' (Austrian), 'you are young and beautiful' (red rosebud), 'you may hope' (rose leaf), 'yours, heart and soul' (marechal Niel) and youthful beauty (rosebud).

To dream of a rose is said to indicate that love is around the corner.

Edible hips have a vaguely sweet blandish scent and a rather sharp taste, with sweet overtones.

Warning – the bitter white heel on petals and the irritant hairs on hips should be removed before either petals or hips are processed for consumption.

The rose is believed to have originated in Asia Minor and it is understood that it was from Persia (now Iran) that the great enthusiasm spread for the plant's cultivation. (It is

interesting to note that the Country name of Syria means ‘land of the rose’.) Nowadays there are books galore giving detailed individual, historical, botanical and horticultural information on roses thus the following hardly touches the surface of the subject.

Today there are around 250 species and tens of thousands of cultivated varieties. Authorities contend that *Rosa alba*, *Rosa x centifolia* (Cabbage rose), *Rosa x damascena* (Damask rose), *Rosa gallica* (French rose) and *Rosa moschata* (Musk rose) are the ‘Five Ancestors’ of their family.

Roses grow wild in most of the northern hemisphere but are not seen, unless introduced, in the southern hemisphere. It is believed that the species in this genus (*Rosaceae*) predate man. Some of the world’s museums hold fossil remains found for instance in Asia, in the European Baltic provinces and in Colorado in southern North America. These last are estimated to be at least 35 million years old.

Greek legend provides an explanation for the origin of the rose. Chloris, the goddess of the flowers (for the Romans, Flora) sought the gods’ help to create the most beautiful flower out of the body of a fair nymph she had found in the woods. This transformation was achieved with the help of Aphrodite who gave beauty, of the three Graces (Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia) who offered their own qualities of brilliance, joy and youthful bloom, and of Dionysus who brought nectar and fragrance. Finally Chloris adorned it with a diadem of dewdrops and proclaimed it to be queen of the flowers – as well as her favourite flower. As a result in both ancient Greece and Rome celebrations on the goddess’s festival saw people and animals alike adorned in roses. They were also scattered in the paths of victors, strewn under chariot wheels and hung on the prows of war-vessels.

In wartime Roman victors were decorated with roses but during the rule of early Roman Emperors their use by the civilian population was curtailed and flaunting this could even result in imprisonment. Once this restriction relaxed however Roman banquets were decorated with roses that even on occasion carpeted the floor, and guests were often adorned with garlands of roses as they were believed to prevent drunkenness. At weddings the bride and groom were crowned with roses and rose garlands were also evident at funerals. This Roman enthusiasm for the flower among the élite is well illustrated by two Roman poets, Horace (65-8) and a later compatriot Martial (c.40-c.104), both of whom contended cause to note (pragmatically, or sourly) that the Roman love of roses seemed to be at the expense of a basic commodity, grain.

Rose leaves are said to have been one of the at least 36 ingredients used by Mithridates (c.132-63 BC), the 1st Century King of Pontus (northern Turkey), in a poison antidote (known as Antidotum Mithridaticum or Theriac) which he took daily to acquire an overall immunity – an important consideration if it is remembered that he gained his position of power by poisoning his opposition.

The red or white colour of a particular rose is explained in many different legends. A Greek myth tells how Aphrodite’s blood turned a white rose red when she pricked her foot on a thorn while going to the aid of the dying Adonis. A traditional Turkish Moslem story describes how a white rose was stained with the blood of Muhammad. And in Christian lore the blood of martyrs is said to have changed the white rose to red.

The diversity in the symbolic use of the rose must rival that of any other plant. For early Christians it was not a respected flower – some authorities wonder if this might be due to its association with pagan revelry or perhaps Roman exclusivity. In time this aversion (for whatever reason) was overcome however and red roses came to symbolize the blood of the early Christian martyrs, and five rose petals represented Christ’s five wounds. Christian legend tells how the initially prickle-less rose in the Garden of Eden only sprouted thorns after Adam and Eve’s fall from grace and banishment as a reminder to

man of his imperfect nature. Its symbolic representation for Christians covers very many things not least divine love, mercy, martyrdom, victory and forgiveness. In addition the rose is a symbol of Christ, as well as the Virgin Mary, for whom one title is 'Mystical Rose'. For some Christians the rose can mean 'heavenly bliss', while a red rose can be a symbol of both the vanities of the world and misfortune. Rose carvings on Christian tombs symbolise 'resurrection'. The rose has also been associated with several Christian saints including St. Theresa of Lisieux (1873-1897). She is particularly celebrated for her obedience to the rigorous demands of the Carmelite order despite extreme ill-health and is represented with a bunch of roses.

It is well known that red roses have long been a symbol of love. Today in the Western World St. Valentine's Day (14th February) is widely celebrated as a day for lovers – and roses, an unseasonal flower at that time in north-western Europe, are in great demand. The day is exploited commercially and roses can increase in price by 300% overnight for that twenty four hours. In the mid-1990s Britain was importing 3-4 million roses from Colombia for these festivities.

Literature equates the perfect flower with love, beauty, perfection, youth and immortality. The thorns are associated with guilt and the pain of love, while the dying blooms relate to the transitory nature of youth and beauty. So many poets have written of the rose not least the Englishman, Robert Herrick (1591-1674) who in one of his lesser known poems today, *To the Virgins, to make much of Time*, describes unusually a rose's funeral. It was he who also gave the familiar lines

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smells today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The rose received much attention from early 19th Century English poets including William Blake (1757-1827), Percy Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821). The roll-call of English literati who have embraced the flower is unending and further reference here would be inappropriate except possibly mention of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the English playwright, and poet. He wove the rose in general into many of his plays in emblem and allegory, and also included reference to specific roses – the Red Rose, White Rose, Provençal Rose, Damask Rose, Sweet Briar and so on. The Red and White Roses of the houses of York and Lancaster feature particularly in *Henry VI* (notably Parts 1 and 3), but of all the many references perhaps this from one of his Sonnets encapsulates for many his feelings for the flowers.

O, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses;
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their masked buds discloses
But, for their virtue only is their show,
They live unwoo'd, and unrespected fade;
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made,

It is surprising to learn that one of Scotland's poets, William Dunbar (c.1460-c.1520) seems to have preferred the rose to his homeland's national emblem the cotton-thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), and he expressed these feelings in poetry.

Nor hold none other flower in sic dainty

As the fresh rose of colour red and white;
For if thou dost, hurt is thine honesty,
Considering that no flower is so perfite,
So full of virtue, pleasaunce, and delight,
So full of blissful angelic beauty,
Imperial birth, honour, and dignity.

And his peer one of Scotland's favourite sons, Robert Burns (1759-1796) wrote a poem, *A Red, Red Rose*, that opens with lines now familiar far beyond Scottish shores.

O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June:
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

The flower has received equal attention in many other countries. The noted French man of letters, Denis Diderot (1713-1784) in his *Réve d'Alembert*, referred to a famous reflection of a literary compatriot, Fontenelle (1657-1757) in *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. In this he ponders as if himself a rose, on the flower's short life. He muses that to a rose it must seem that within its memory nothing alters. The gardener is constant
.... he has always been there ... certainly .. he does not die as we do
.....

Then from the United States there is one other more familiar phrase that really ought to be included.

Rose is a rose is a rose.

This came from the well-known writer, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) – in what is described as a state of pragmatism. It is understood that she wished to point out that despite all the symbolism, allegory and mysticism the rose is a plant – a beautiful flower. What is poignant however is that she herself had the phrase printed in a circle which she adopted as her own symbol, we are told, to enable easier recall of the flowers' shapes, colours and fragrances.

There is also a proverb that can be traced to 1789 and the French writer, Nicolas Chamfort (1741-1794) which runs

Revolutions are not made with rose-water.

This suggests that greater changes are made with argument than with arms.

Although the rose had long been depicted in illuminated manuscripts it seems that it was not until about the 15th Century that European artists began to appreciate that its undoubted beauty was worthy, in itself, of representation. Since then the flower's aesthetic delight has been captured by many noted painters, not least Pierre Joseph Redouté (1759-1840). This famous Belgian-born Frenchman whose major patron was the wife of Napoleon I, Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1814) became known as a botanical painter and a specialist in roses – and prints of his work were reproduced on many household objects. Before she died the Empress commissioned Redouté's famous book, *Les Roses*, but by the time it was published in 1817 Louis XVIII had assumed the throne. This explains why the dedication was made to the then Duchesse d'Orléans instead of the Empress Joséphine.

The flower has also played a role in opera and ballet. For example a silver rose is instrumental in maintaining the plot of *Der Rosenkavalier* written by the German composer, Richard Strauss (1864-1949). Another example this time from the world of ballet must be *Le Spectre de la Rose*. It is said by some authorities to have been the highlight of the careers of both the Russian-born American dancer and choreographer, Michel Fokine (1880-1942) and the fabled Russian dancer, Nijinsky (1890-1950) – the former for the choreography and the latter for his inspirational dancing.

A rosary used in the Roman Catholic Church has 165 beads (at one time these were made from rose leaves) and these are divided into chaplets of 55. The rose supplies all three chaplets, one represents green for 'you', the second represents thorn for 'sorrow', and the third represents rose for 'glory'.

The rose has also been a token of silence going back at least to ancient Egyptian times. In Greek legend Eros gives the god of Silence a rose as a symbol of love in return for his agreement not to reveal Aphrodite's love affairs. Freyja, the Northern European goddess of love who was known for her ability to keep secrets, had the rose dedicated to her by the Teutonic tribes. Thus in some European countries when secret matters were being discussed a rose would be suspended from the ceiling – and even hung over dinner tables to indicate discretion after the meal. This was eventually replaced with carvings or in due course elaborate ceiling light fittings referred to as a 'rose' and is the origin of the term *sub rosa*. From 1526 in Christian churches the motif appeared over confessional boxes. In 18th Century England the Jacobite supporters of Bonnie Prince Charlie (1720-1788), also known as the 'Young Pretender', had to be silent about their allegiance and adopted the white rose as their emblem.

This rose motif had extended not only to the ceiling decoration mentioned earlier but also the design of windows, especially ecclesiastical ones. One of the most elaborate of the English cathedral rose windows is held by many to be that of York Minster - and its Chapter House bears an unusual inscription namely

Ut rosa flos florum sic est domus domorum

(As the rose is the flower of flowers, this is the house of all houses.)

The flower has appeared in heraldic devices. In Roman times it was depicted on soldiers' shields. More recent history however provides a well-known example and that is in the Wars of the Roses in 15th Century England. The House of York adopted the white rose and that of Lancaster the red. After battle was over the two Houses came to be united in the marriage of Henry VII (1457-1509) of Lancaster to Elizabeth of York and, as the first Tudor king, Henry adopted the stylised red and white Tudor rose (red outer and white inner petals) for his emblem. A silver and red rose (representing England) is depicted in the grass beneath the shield in the coat of arms of the United Kingdom, and the flower also became a national emblem of England. The rose features in many other heraldic devices, including the coat of arms of St. Lucia in the Caribbean. In the mid-1980s a red rose was adopted as a political party symbol by the British Labour Party – a move which caused initial consternation among some apolitical bodies whose members for instance wished to sport a rose on the English national St. George's Day (23rd April) or simply wear a rose daily in a lapel. In 1955 New York State in the United States adopted a rose as an emblem too.

From the 12th Century to the present day a rose oil has been an ingredient in the coronation oil used to anoint British monarchs. (Initially this must have been imported as the distillation process stumbled on in India did not materialise for a further four or five hundred years. From then on otto of roses was used as it is today.) In 16th Century Elizabethan England dew that had collected on rose petals was sought after as a rare and costly cosmetic, and a distillation of rose petals (rosewater) was used for bathing the face and hands.

Avicenna (980-1037), the celebrated Arabian philosopher and physician, is believed to have been the first to prepare rose water. Prior to this it is thought that roses were generally steeped in oil ie. *oleum rosarum* which was a fatty oil scented with rose petals. In the following century the highly respected sultan of Egypt and Syria, Saladin (1137- 1193) illustrated well the Middle Eastern practice maintained for centuries of using rose oil and rose water for cleansing. Before entering Jerusalem he demanded that the walls of Omar's mosque be washed in rose water. Today 10 tonnes of rose water are given

annually (half by a Turkish distiller and half by an Iranian distiller) to wash Mecca's walls during the pilgrimage.

A process for the extraction of essential oil (Otto or Attar of roses) was found in northern India by chance some time between 1582 and 1612. There are at least two independent reports that mention the discovery made at the marriage of Jahangir (1569-1627) to the princess Nur Jahan. (He ruled a large part of northern India as Mughal from 1605.) His father was Akbar the Great and the Mughals celebrated in great style. For the wedding a moat was dug out encircling the garden and this was filled with rose water. During the ceremonies the happy couple rowed on the fragrant water and as they made their way noticed that the heat of the sun had separated the water from, what proved to be, the essential oil. This revelation was immediately translated into practice and long before the end of the 17th Century distilleries were producing Otto of roses on a large scale in northern India. The details of the process passed to the Turks who in turn introduced it to Europe. Here Bulgaria is believed to have been the first and initially major distiller in that Continent. By the middle of the 18th Century a small amount was being produced in southern France and this only expanded when the French took advantage of Bulgaria's involvement with the political changes in central Europe during the mid-19th Century.

Up to this time French Ottos had been derived almost exclusively from the cabbage rose (*Rosa x centifolia*). Expansion of the industry there led to experimentation with other species and large rose plantations were laid down. Meanwhile the Bulgarian rose industry began to bloom again, based upon the damask rose (*Rosa x damascena*) and a musk rose (*Rosa moschata*). In 1919 at the end of the 1st World War the Bulgarian government agreed to pay for North American food out of the proceeds of the Bulgarian Otto crop and it nationalized the Otto industry. At the beginning of the 20th Century Otto came, not only from Bulgaria and France, but also Cyprus, India, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco and Germany. At the end of the 20th Century the Middle East continued to dominate the rose oil industry – and processing methods had changed relatively little since the 17th Century. Modern technology in the 1990s however enabled the English to participate again in the Otto industry (her small but significant involvement in the 17th Century had bowed eventually to French competition). Under traditional methods gigantic rose oil stills are idle for most of the year and authorities noted that an English technological breakthrough as the 21st Century loomed heralded not only economical extraction but also preferable environmental advantages – so much so that Middle Eastern distillers declared interest in these developments.

One role not mentioned so far is that of the rose-rent. This tithe was once fairly common, certainly in various parts of England. An example of it was the basis of an old City of London tradition re-established in 1924 and known as the Knollys Rose Ceremony. In mid-June the Lord Mayor of London is ceremonially presented with a red rose (lying on a velvet cushion) by the Churchwardens of All-Hallows-by-the-Tower or their peers. The original red rose was rent demanded by the City of London's Mayor and Corporation in the 14th Century from Sir Robert Knollys (a highly respected soldier who died in 1407) and his wife Constance. This couple owned two houses opposite each other in the City's Seething Lane and after obtaining a licence they had erected a bridge between the two buildings and thus incurred this payment. A more recent example is provided by St. Olave's and St. Saviour's Grammar School Foundation. Until the early 1930s, following the Birkenhead Act of 1922 under which payments such as rose rent were required to be replaced with money, the Governors of the Grammar School paid a red rose as annual rent to the United Charities – a payment which can be traced back to 3rd October 1656.

Another tradition connected with the City of London – more precisely the Oratory of the Wakefield Tower in the Tower of London – is known as the Ceremony of the Lilies and

Roses (see *Lilium*). It honours the founder of Eton College and King's College, Cambridge, Henry VI (1421-1471) who died on 21st May 1471 (some say murdered). Lilies and roses lie for a day on either side of the tablet marking the place where he is believed to have met his sudden death.

Both for medicinal and culinary purposes (the Chinese eat rose petals as a vegetable) it is probable that nowadays the dog-rose (*Rosa canina*) dominates any other. In modern times the essential oil is used by the food industry particularly in marzipan, and it also provides a fragrance for the perfumery and cosmetics industries, and a flavouring for the drinks industries.

Yellow rose is the birthday flower for 2nd February. White rosebud is the birthday flower for 6th July. Red rosebud is the birthday flower for 7th July. White rose is the birthday flower for 8th July. Red rose is the birthday flower for 13th October.

The rose is also associated with the month of June.