

By Kylee Baumle

Valentine's Day is here and many of you will be receiving flowers from someone who loves or cares for you. The most commonly given flower is the red rose, but what if you get something else? Is your lover trying to tell you something in a subtle way, something that they're reluctant to say any other way?

Flowers have a language all their own, some of which remains commonly known and used to this day. Red roses mean love and yellow ones signify friendship. But, the messages of yesteryear weren't always those of love or friendship.

Though the language of flowers has its origins as far back as the 1600s, their use to convey specific messages has been linked most significantly to Victorian England. During the mid-1800s, it became popular in the U.S. as well.

Most of the messages sent concerned themselves with different aspects of love. For instance, if a young man met a girl and he wanted to let her know that he was interested in her, he might send her a bouquet of purple lilacs, which were symbolic of the first stirrings of love.

If she understood his message, but she wasn't interested, she might send a return bouquet of white tulips for "one-sided love" or morning glories to let him know that he loved in vain.

Of course, if she was open to his affections, a likely candidate to send back might be red carnations, which signify passion and say, "My heart aches for you."

Flowers sent between friends was a common practice too, as it is today, although now the language of flowers isn't often specific beyond roses.

Flowers that wished the recipient luck or good fortune might be gardenias or Bells of Ireland. You could express thanks by sending sweet pea blossoms.

Things could get a little sticky with some flowers though. Just as with the spoken language, where the same word might have multiple meanings, the same flower could have vastly different intentions.

Remember the yellow rose? Perfect among friends, right? Maybe not. In Victorian times, it could also mean jealousy or infidelity. I wonder how many misunderstandings a bouquet of yellow roses caused!

It wasn't always flowers that were sent, herbs played along too. Coriander expressed lust, rue signified regret, and of course, rosemary was for remembrance, the latter making an appearance in Shakespeare's Hamlet around 1600.

The small bouquets that were often sent as coded messages were called tussie-mussies, a term that we're familiar with today, even if the flowers making them up no longer carry significance other than they look pretty and smell nice. Their fragrance gives them another term nosegay, which is "a pleasure for the nose."

What kind of flowers are you hoping for this Valentine's Day? In just a few months, I'll have a whole garden full of them, but tomorrow, just about any would make me smile, no matter what they used to mean.

Read Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.