

# Why love and flowers on Valentine's Day?

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Valentine's Day is now the No. 1 holiday for florists. Pondering this fact, I have many questions. When did it become a tradition to give flowers to your beloved on Valentine's Day? Today, about 42% of the flowers on Valentine's Day are red roses, 29% roses of other colors. Why? Was there a St. Valentine, and why do we associate him with love and roses?

First, St. Valentine! Of the St. Valentine, whose feast is on Feb. 14, nothing is known about him except for his name and that he was buried at the Via Flaminia north of Rome on Feb. 14. It is not known if the feast of Feb. 14 celebrates one or more saints of the same name. We do have a record, though, of the establishment of the feast of St. Valentine in 496 by Pope Gelasius I, but whether St. Valentine was a priest, bishop, or martyr (or all three) is unknown.

"The Legenda Aurea," or "Golden Legend," of Jacobus de Voragine, written ca. 1260, gives a brief synopsis of the life of St. Valentine, which now has become legend. Supposedly Valentine was a Roman priest martyred during the reign of Claudius II (Cladius Gothicus). He was arrested and imprisoned after violating a prohibition against marrying couples and otherwise aiding the persecuted Christians. While in jail, however, Valentine fell in love with the jailor's daughter, and before he was beheaded, he gave the girl a note and one red rose.

During the Victorian era, floral symbolism was very popular among young lovers. They could send messages using different flowers to stand for different meanings, right under their parents' noses (the Victorian method of youths texting, I guess).

"The Florist's Manual" (1833) relates the story that the rose was sacred to Venus, and while the flower was originally white, Venus became wounded by its thorns, and the rose turned red from the blood.

According to the "Flora's Lexicon" (1870), roses themselves meant "Beauty," while a rosebud meant "a young girl." "Flora's Dictionary" (1831) says that a red rose bud meant "You are young and beautiful," while a full-blown red rose meant "beauty." Today, red roses have come to mean "I love you," the ultimate symbol of romantic love.

Fortunately for my wallet, my wife does

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not like roses but, instead, daisies. While roses escalate from about \$2 to \$12-20 per stem just before Feb. 14, daisies, which universally symbolize "Innocence," remain around the same price.

If you want to break the trend of red roses on Valentine's Day, consider sending your beloved the floral symbolism from "Flora's Lexicon" (along with a card explaining your thoughtful choices, i.e., implying the time that you invested to show your love and this wasn't just something that you grabbed on your way home on Feb. 14 at the grocery store)

Boxwood=Constancy  
China Aster=Variety of Charms  
Chrysanthemum=Cheerfulness  
Daisy=Innocence  
Holly=Foresight  
Ivy=Friendship  
Lily=Purity and Modesty  
Rosemary=Your Presence Revives Me

*On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.*



Submitted photo

Roses have traditionally been associated with love and are a natural for Valentine's Day