

Tale from the Garden!

Few annual flowers have the lasting appeal and pastoral beauty of sweet peas. Twining lazily around a rustic trellis, they seem the very antithesis of our busy lives. The sweet peas your grandmother grew, truly deserved the name “sweet” because of their delightful fragrance. With their seductive perfume, sweet peas make great flowers for gardens and bouquets.

Its popular name is actually a direct translation of its Latin name, *Lathyrus odoratus*, or “fragrant pea.”



The sweet pea is an annual flower & is most commonly grown on a trellis, where its twining stems can climb to heights of more than six feet. Originally purple in colour, sweet peas are now available in a huge palette of colours, from pearly white through ice cream pastels to ritzy magentas and inky purples. Their dainty winged blossoms are matched only by their honey and orange blossom perfume. The combination of the delightful scent and the ability to produce so many blooms for the house over a long period of cutting has ensured their popularity. Despite their delicate look, sweet peas are quite hardy but they are happiest with their heads in the sun and their roots deep in cool, moist soil.

The sweet pea is native to Sicily and surrounding islands in the Mediterranean. According to legend, the sweet pea was first “discovered” by a Franciscan monk, Francis Cupani, wandering the hillside in the 17th century. He was so charmed by it that he brought it home and planted it in his garden. Since then, the sweet pea made its way to many gardens and nurseries, then up through Europe. In the 1800s, Scottish nursery proprietor Henry Eckford began breeding it. He developed a wide range of cultivars that are still in use today. He helped turn it from a rather insignificant if sweetly scented flower into a floral sensation of the late Victorian era. Victorians loved sweet peas for their colour diversity and fragrance.

By 1901, Eckford had introduced a total of 115 of the 264 cultivars grown at the time. Eckford was presented with the RHS Victoria Medal of Honour for his work. He died in 1906, but his work was continued for a time by his son John Eckford. Thanks to the work of the Eckford Sweet Pea Society, Wem in Shropshire, is now well known as the birthplace of the modern sweet pea. In the late 1980s, the Sweet Pea Society of Wem started an annual show. Many of the street signs now carry a sweet-pea motif, and an area of the town is known as Eckford Park. There is also a cultivar 'Dorothy Eckford', named after a family member.

Some folks say that growing sweet peas is akin to making a pie crust! Some people have the knack, others don't! This plant grows from large, easy-to-handle, pea-like seeds. Still, they're a bit tricky because they are slow to germinate. It's worth experimenting with different seeds each year & early sowing is one of the secrets to growing sweet peas! A couple of tips ... pick the flowers for bouquets often and the plant will put energy into more blooms instead of going to seed. Gather the flowers in the morning when the dew is still on them. This is when their scent is the sweetest.

The more you pick the more they produce, right until the first frosts. When the leaves start to lose their colour, let a few of the last flowers form seedpods. Dry them on a windowsill and then store in an envelope in a dry place to sow next year.

Did you know ... the sweet pea is a remarkable fly deterrent!

Interestingly, though *Lathyrus odoratus* smells amazing to us, flies do not agree. If they smell it, they'll turn tail and run, so it's a good option for outdoor hangouts and events!

“The odor of the sweet pea is so offensive to flies that it will drive them out of a sick-room, though not in the slightest degree disagreeable to the patient.” - A tip from The 1899 Old Farmer's Almanac.

In his poem 'I stood tip-toe upon a hill' (1884) Keats ponders on the delicate pleasure of the Sweet Pea:

"Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight:

With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,

And taper fingers catching at all things,

To bind them all about with tiny rings."

—John Keats (1795–1821)

"Hey, sweet pea" is an expression we've all grown up hearing. Whether a parent or a teacher or a treasured grandmother was saying it, it filled us with comfort and love. But few of us have actually spent time thinking about where this phrase actually came from. And, as with many names and endearments, the answer is a flower.

The sweet pea is one of the most quaint and darling of the blossoms, and it deserves the full treatment.

In the language of flowers, the sweet pea holds the symbolic meaning of blissful pleasure. In Victorian times, flowers were used as coded messages to express feelings that could not be spoken aloud & sending sweet peas meant "Thank You for a Lovely Time." Its upright, clumping flower clusters also symbolize good wishes, friendship, kindness, and goodbyes. Many believe that these blooms leave a positive experience and a thoughtful way to say thank you as they further symbolize gratitude.

On Monday 5th July, the Royal Family celebrated the 73rd anniversary of the NHS with the award of the George Cross and a cathedral service. In a personal message, the Queen said NHS staff across the UK had worked "with courage, compassion and dedication" for more than 70 years.

The Duke of Cambridge joined NHS staff at a thanksgiving service at St Paul's Cathedral in London & he later hosted a Buckingham Palace tea party to thank NHS workers.

The George Cross, instituted by King George VI in 1940 during the height of the Blitz in World War Two, is awarded for "acts of the greatest heroism or of the most courage in circumstances of extreme danger".

In her handwritten message, the Queen wrote: "It is with great pleasure, on behalf of a grateful nation, that I award the George Cross to the National Health Services of the United Kingdom.

This award recognises all NHS staff, past and present, across all disciplines and all four nations.

Over more than seven decades, and especially in recent times, you have supported the people of our country with courage, compassion and dedication, demonstrating the highest standards of public service.

You have our enduring thanks and heartfelt appreciation."

Graham Kendrick's well-known song 'The Servant King' highlights the way Jesus used his power in the service of all. Let's show our enduring thanks & heartfelt gratitude by bringing 'our lives as a daily offering'.