

Tale from the Garden!

Saturday 16th April marks the First Day of Passover (Pesach) which fall between Good Friday & Easter Sunday. Passover is a Jewish holiday celebrated for eight days in early spring to commemorate when Jewish people were emancipated from slavery in Egypt. On the first two nights of Passover, traditional Jewish families celebrate by hosting Seders, or large ceremonial dinners that are steeped in rituals. Seders are typically large gatherings and involve a highly ordered dinner full of readings from the Haggadah – a book that describes the holiday's origins. Hosts prepare for Seders for hours, days and even sometimes weeks, by cleaning and decorating their homes and tables and cooking tons of food, including the Passover lamb.

Much of the decor for Passover Seders is floral, so read on for more about the traditional flowers associated with Passover:

Traditional Passover Flowers

Passover is full of symbolism, and the flowers used to decorate Seder tables are meant to spread the joy of the Hebrew slaves' emancipation and exodus from Egypt. As with Easter, the traditional flowers associated with Passover are typically those that bloom in the spring, but Passover flowers are usually shades of blue and white. Some traditional Passover flowers used to decorate for Seders include lilies, daisies, violets, carnations, irises, tulips and hyacinths. Some families also decorate with bright yellow sunflowers or daffodils to embrace the joyfulness of the occasion.

Another Passover Tradition: "The Night of Lettuce and Flowers"

Passover has another fun tradition that includes flowers. Historically, on the Night of Lettuce and Flowers, unmarried men would stand in the street of their neighbourhood holding a single flower. Then, single girls would stand on their porches in their finest clothes and wearing silver & gold jewellery and wait for the bachelors to approach them. A bachelor offered his flower to whichever girl he was interested in pursuing. If the girl accepted the flower, it conveyed that she was interested & she'd invite him into her home to speak with her parents. The bachelor, who of course wants to get engaged, would send one of the youngsters from his family with a lettuce and flower basket to the girl's home. How romantic! If anyone can tell me why a lettuce, I'll be pleased to know! As we approach Easter, let's choose one of the most exquisite of blue Seder flowers for this week's Tale from the Garden. With striking uniqueness and beauty, irises have rich meanings, and when given as gifts, they can convey deep sentiments. With over 200 varieties in a wide spectrum of colours, the iris, which fittingly takes its name from the Greek word for "rainbow," can be found in virtually every part of the world, growing both naturally and in farms. While garden irises can come in any of these many varieties, the flower's cut versions are mostly blue (the most popular type), white, and yellow.



The iris's history is rich, dating back to Ancient Greek times when the Greek Goddess Iris, the messenger of the gods and the personification of the rainbow, acted as the link between heaven and earth. Purple irises were planted over the graves of women to summon the Goddess to guide the dead in their journey. The aesthetic beauty of the iris has been celebrated for thousands of years. Ancient Egyptian kings marvelled in the iris's exotic nature, and drawings have been found of the flower in a number of Egyptian pyramids that scientists have dated back to 1500BC. During the Middle Ages, the meaning of irises became linked to the French monarchy, and the Fleur-de-lis eventually became the recognized national symbol of France. Irises also decorated the arms of Louis XVIII, promising protection against death and served as a model for Vincent van Gogh.

From their earliest years, irises were used to make perfume and as a medicinal remedy. Today, they are primarily seen in gardens, in bouquets, and in the wild all over the world. Irises, along with crocuses and freesia, belong to

the Iridaceae family. They grow best in the northern climates ... and they curiously do not like having wet feet. If you spot an iris in flower at the edge of a pool or pond, you can be sure that the water there is shallow! Through its intricate history, the meanings of the irises three upright petals have come to symbolize the 'trinity' of faith, hope, and wisdom. They open up completely, so that we can see deep into the heart of the bloom. Depending on factors such as colour and region, irises may bear additional meanings as well. In some parts of the world, the dark blue or purple iris can denote royalty, whereas the yellow iris can be a symbol of passion. Irises may also express courage and admiration. The many meanings of the iris make the flower a great choice for an array of gift-giving occasions: corporate, sympathy, get well, 'just because' and birthday are just some of the occasions for which irises might be the perfect choice.

Perhaps the most poignant meaning, though, is how this three-petaled flower with its sword-shaped leaves became connected to Luke 2 v35 which tells of Mary's heart being figuratively pierced with a sword, a foretaste of the pain she would experience at Christ's Passion.

The passage relates the time when Jesus was presented in the Temple ... 'When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord") ...' Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms & praises God for allowing him to see the Christ child, 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

'The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'"

But let's remember that Easter is as much about the Passion as it is about the Resurrection.

Remember that IRIS was the goddess of the rainbow and the messenger of the Olympian gods. She was often described as the handmaiden and personal messenger of Hera. Iris was a goddess of sea and sky (her father Thaumas "the wondrous" was a marine-god, and her mother Elektra "the amber" a cloud-nymph). She uses her power of being the daughter of a cloud nymph and a marine god to make rainbows & these become the means by which she delivers her messages. When you see a rainbow, do you hear/see a message?

The 'Iris' ('rainbow') appears in Genesis 9 v13 where God says to Noah, "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." The use of rainbows to represent the sign of a covenant between God and humankind appears repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments.

Other verses where the 'Iris' is mentioned include:

Ezekiel 1 v28 'Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.'

Revelations 4 v3 'And the one who sat there [on the throne in heaven] had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.'

The Iris is a symbol of God's promise to His people. It appears in the Old Testament to remind us that God set into place a system of covenant with humanity, while also appearing in Revelations to represent the sign of His promise to believers. The might of the message of the Resurrection presents us with us with unequivocal assurance that God has won, God is winning, and God will win!

