

'Let everything in creation draw you to God. Refresh your mind with some innocent recreation and needful rest. If it were only to saunter through the garden or the field, listening to the sermon preached by the flowers, the trees, the meadows, the sun, the sky, and the whole universe, you will find that they exhort you to love and praise God, that they excite you to extol the greatness of the sovereign architect who has given them their being.' - St Paul of the Cross

A Liturgy of Flowers

Marian Gardens have their roots in a spiritual imagination that recognizes the divine throughout creation. During the medieval Age of Faith, rural Christians bestowed names upon flowers and plants to symbolically represent Mary, the Mother of God, as well as the life of Christ, the saints and the liturgical year. These humble people had no books about devotions to Our Lady. Rather, they had creation; they had flowers. These names were almost forgotten once the printing press allowed for easier access to the proper classification of plants although some names held strong, (for example, marigolds come from the old name, Mary's Gold). The garden as God's handiwork is a rich source of inspiration, because in it we encounter God, the Creator in creation. The basis for understanding the Mary Garden is through discovering its devotional meanings. Symbolism is the system that provides the meaning.

The Mary Gardens movement in the twentieth century resurrected the tradition of using flowers and their historic religious names to create spaces of prayer dedicated to the intercession of Our Lady. The first public Mary Garden in the United States is located at the Angelus Tower of St. Joseph's Church, Woods Hole, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, established in 1932, comprised of some fifty Flowers of Our Lady from the medieval countryside of England, and is beautifully maintained today.

Here are some popular flowers and their religious names.

- Baby's Breath - Our Lady's Veil
- Black-eyed Susan - Golden Jerusalem
- Bleeding Heart - Mary's Heart
- Columbine - Our Lady's Shoes
- Dahlia - Church Flower
- Daisy - Mary-Love
- Dandelion - Mary's Bitter Sorrows
- Forget-me-nots - Eyes of Mary
- Iris - Mary's Sword of Sorrow
- Impatiens- Mother's Love
- Madonna Lily - Annunciation Lily
- Pansy - Our Lady's Delight

- Peony - Pentecost Rose
- Poppy - Christ's Blood Drops
- Sunflower /Marigold - Mary's Gold
- Violet - Our Lady's Modesty.
- Rosemary and Lavender – Our Lady's Drying Plants
 "The legend goes that when Our Lady was doing laundry for the Christ child, she laid his swaddling clothes upon the rosemary plant or the lavender bush and that is how they dried. And then that's also how they got their sweet heavenly scents."

The power of plants to remind us of God's presence remains intact today. Mary Gardens can be in pots, flower beds, walkways, shrines...anywhere! They have a statue of the Virgin Mary as the focal point, flowers, trees and herbs and a place to rest and pray.