

Flower folklore

By Sharon Williams
Copley News Service

There's more to a flower than just its fragrance. Each has its own legend, superstition and story, with many as magical as the blossoms themselves.

Following are a few examples, taken from "Garden Flower Folklore" by Laura C. Martin (Globe Pequot Press):

• **Pansy.** Long associated with love, the Celts made tea from dried pansy leaves and used it as a love potion. The name pansy comes from the French word, *pen-see*, which means thought. This name was given many centuries ago because the French believed the pansy could make one's lover think of him or her.

• **Sweet Pea.** Superstition holds that if you sow the seeds of a sweet pea before sunrise on St. Patrick's Day, you will end up with larger, more fragrant blossoms. Its genus name, *Lathyrus*, derives from the Greek word for pulse.

• **Lily.** A symbol of majesty, the lily has been beloved by both princes and paupers throughout the world. This flower is often mentioned in Greek and Roman mythologies and in legends from

China and Japan.

• **Poppy.** In Europe, country girls played a fortune-telling game with poppies. A girl would place a poppy petal in her lover's hand, then hit it with the edge of her own hand. If she heard a loud popping noise, that meant he was true to her. Silence, on the other hand, would reveal unfaithfulness.

• **Cosmos.** The name of this flower is derived from the Greek word that means "ordered universe." It was given to the plant because of its simple balance of blossoms. Spanish priests were believed to have grown cosmos in their gardens as symbols of harmony.

• **Forget-Me-Not.** According to legend, this flower was named after an angel fell in love with a mortal woman. He was exiled and told he could return only if he placed the flower in every corner of the world. His beloved helped him, and so moved St. Peter by their devotion that he allowed both to enter heaven.

• **Impatiens.** Edward Bach, an early 20th century physician, often prescribed a concoction made of the oil of pink impatiens mixed with brandy. He believed it would help those who were overanxious or irritable.

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