

MARY GARDENS

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NOTE: The following article is written about the practices of one faith tradition. The Trumpet Vine welcomes horticultural articles from all cultural and faith perspectives. We invite you to write about gardening from your faith traditions. If there are concerns about diversity and inclusion, please reach out to ANR Educator, Maggie Fitzpatrick at Fitzpatrick.255@osu.edu or 216-429-8200.



A Mary garden is a small sacred garden enclosing a statue or shrine of the Virgin Mary. The practice originated among monasteries and convents in medieval Europe so there would be flowers to adorn the altar. So many flowers bloomed in May that it became Mary's month. The Venerable Bede (673-735), Benedictine monk, historian, and scholar, wrote that the white lily represented the Blessed Virgin. The white petals symbolized the purity of her body and the golden anthers the beauty of her soul. Later, St.

Bernard called Mary "the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, the rose of charity, the Balm of Gilead, and the golden gillyflower of heaven." With time, more and more herbs and flowers, associated with Mary in various ways, took on symbolic significance and were adopted as signifying her specific virtues. When settlers arrived in the New World, native plants were added to the list.



The first Mary garden in the United States was founded in 1932 in Woods Hole on Cape Cod. It has been restored to its original planting plan. This garden

inspired John S. Stokes (1920-2007) to found "Mary Gardens" in order to promote the idea of gardens dedicated to the Virgin Mary. He launched the www.mgardens.org website in late 1995 and devoted the rest of his years adding to his vast archive of flower photos, scholarly research and correspondence. Upon his death, the website and all his research were donated to the Marian Library at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

Anyone can create a Mary garden. It can be as small as a flower pot (a nice gift for a homebound person) or as large as space allows. The only requirements are that it include a statue of the Virgin and at least one plant associated with her. It should be a center for devotion, prayer and meditation. Place your pot near a comfortable seat indoors. Include seats in the garden. A water feature is soothing and conducive to meditation. A fountain could occupy the center. Why not add some stepping stones with spiritual words painted or carved onto them? A bird feeder would be a nice addition. Many birds are associated with Christian attributes. You could design it in the shape of a cross with the statue at the head and benches at each arm. You might want to use medieval garden plans as your guide. Or, if there is enough room, you could let a path meander through the garden with stops representing different **phases of Mary's life** with appropriate plantings. For example: **Annunciation** - *lilium candidum*, the white Madonna lily, representing Mary's purity; **Mary's Visit to Elizabeth** - *Aquilegia vulgaris*, columbine, "Lady's Slippers," which were said to have sprung up under Mary's feet as she travelled there; **Nativity** - *hellebore niger*, Christmas rose

or *dianthus caryophyllus*, carnation, which is said to have flowered at Christ's birth; Epiphany – *leucanthemum vulgare*, oxeye daisy, which looked like the star the Magi had followed and they found growing outside the stable; **Flight into Egypt** – lavender, "Mary's Drying Plant" which was said to have received its scent after Mary laid Jesus' clothes on it to dry; **Finding Jesus in the Temple** – pansy, "Mary's Delight," **Crucifixion** – lily of the valley, "Mary's Tears" or German iris, "Mary's Sword of Sorrow," **Resurrection** – ivy, symbol of eternal life; Assumption – *calendula*, "Mary's Heavenly Glory." There is even a white *hemerocallis*, 'Serene Madonna,' called the assumption lily, which blooms around August 15th, Feast of the Assumption. Ideally, every Mary garden should have a rose, symbol of Mary herself and all her attributes. You could grow one over an arbor used as an entrance to the garden or over a bench to give shade to the visitor. A rose trained into a standard would be lovely in the center. Different colored roses are associated with different attributes. For example, white for purity, red for sorrow, yellow for glory.



There are so many plants associated with Mary that you will not have a hard time filling your garden space. You could plan the garden by color such as blue for her robe, and white for her purity and yellow for her glory. Here is an idea for a full sun, summer garden: Blue- *centaurea cyanea*, bachelor's buttons (Mary's Crown); *consolida ajacis*, larkspur (Mary's Tears); *nepeta faassenii*, catmint (Lady's Nettle). White – *gyposiphilia paniculata*, baby's breath (Lady's Veil); *lobularia maritima*, sweet alyssum (Blessed by Mary); *hemerocallis* 'Serene Madonna,' daylily (Annunciation Lily). Yellow – *calendula officinalis*, pot marigold (Mary's Gold or Mary's Glory); *gaillardia pulchella* or *gaillardia grandiflora*, Indian blanket (The Virgin's Face); *alchemilla mollis* (Lady's Mantle), *antirrhinum majus*, snapdragon (The Infant Jesus' Shoes). For spring flowers, you could add blue *myosotis sylvatica*, forget-me-not (Mary's Eyes), white *bellis perennis*, English daisy (Mary love), yellow *primula vulgaris*, primrose (Lady's Frills). For fall, there are blue aster *nova-belgii*, michaelmas daisy, white clematis *virginiana* (Virgin's Bower) and yellow *solidago canadensis*, goldenrod (Lady Plant). There are also almost 30 herbs associated with Mary that you could mix in and numerous trees and shrubs.

As you can imagine, the possibilities for a Mary garden are almost endless. As with any garden plan, choose plants that will fit into your particular situation -- with sun and wind exposure, soil type, and water needs in mind.

Sources:

<https://www.udayton.edu/imri/mary/h/herbs-and-flowers-of-the-virgin-mary.php/> Stokes Mary Gardens – a vast list of resources.

<https://www.fisheaters.com/marygardens.html>

http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/H020rpMaryGarden_Galitzin.htm

<https://www.scu.edu/media/offices/st-clare-garden/pdfs/Mary-Garden-Plant-List-rev.pdf>