

My Spiritual Garden

by Raija Simmons



*“The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer to God’s heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.”*

Anyone who comes to our home in the summertime, will find this sign by the front door. This little verse says so much about how I love what God has created! When I am outdoors in my flower garden, all my arthritic aches and pains seem to vanish. I am at peace with the world in my own little corner of Eden, soaking in the sight of the ducks and Great Blue Herons on the lake, hearing the whir of the hummingbirds at the feeder and enjoying the intoxicating scent of lilacs, Lily-of-the-Valley and the vanilla of heliotrope. It doesn’t get much better than that!

Over the years that I’ve been green-thumbing, I’ve noticed how many plants have Biblical or spiritual names. It made me curious, wanting to know where some of these names came from and why they were given. It wasn’t deliberate on my part, but just something that evolved over the years into a “spiritual garden” as I wanted to include as many Biblical plants as I could. Some plants are obvious just by looking at them, why they were given a certain name, for instance “Bleeding Heart.” But what about “Jacob’s Ladder,” “Solomon’s Seal,” or “Bethlehem Sage”? Why those names? They must mean something. I had some detective work to do!

Shade Plants

In my shady back yard, I have a patch of “Solomon’s Seal,” a perennial with



long arching stems. The honey-scented creamy blossoms hang beneath the stem in pairs, very pretty in the spring. The secret of its name is in the scars on the rootstock, which look somewhat like a royal seal. It was said that King Solomon, son of King David in the Old Testament, placed his seal of approval on this plant as it was edible and also used for medicinal purposes.

“Jacob’s Ladder” also prefers part shade. It is a perennial with lovely lavender-blue flowers in the summer. The leaves are staggered up the stem like the rungs of a ladder, as seen by Jacob in his dream. “He had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12).

“Monkshood” is a late summer favourite. This perennial can grow

three to four feet tall and enjoys rich, moist soil. The flowers very much resemble a monk’s hood or a helmet with a visor and are commonly purple, blue or white. Sometimes it’s called “Friar’s Cap.” Just as a note to anyone with pets or small children – all parts of this plant are poisonous.

“Bethlehem Sage” or pulmonaria as it is more commonly called, is a low, clumping perennial with leaves speckled white, with pretty blue, pink or white flowers in early spring. It has also been called “Jerusalem Cowslip,” “Virgin’s Tears,” or “Mary’s Tears”. I don’t know if this plant actually grew in Bethlehem or Jerusalem, but the legend of Mary’s Tears says:

“Mary was walking to Jerusalem carrying her infant, intending to present him at the temple. Along the way, she sat down in a garden and began to nurse her child. Unexpectedly, she had a vision of seven agonizing passions. At that moment, she began to weep inconsolably, knowing the entire future fate of her son. As she wept, her son’s mouth pulled loose from her breast, and milk dripped onto the leaves of a plant at her feet, while her tears sprinkled the flowers. From that day on, pulmonaria had pink buds because Mary’s eyes were red from weeping, blue flowers because her veil was blue, and the leaves were spotted from her milk.” A legend only, but interesting reading!

Another interesting plant I had in the shade was “Jack-in-the-Pulpit.” It loves a rich, moist soil. The flower literally looks like a little figure or a preacher, standing in a hooded pulpit! Unfortunately, it did not survive in my garden, probably because it is a little outside of its range for my 2b zone. I may try it again one day.

A lovely spring bloomer is the “Lenten Rose” or hellebore, deriving its name from the habit of blooming around Lent or Easter in the warmer parts of the country. The flower looks like a wild rose and comes in a variety of colours.

Another favourite is the “Lily-of-the-Valley.” A low growing perennial, it produces stems of highly scented white bell-shaped flowers in the spring, and often is used in wedding bouquets. It is mentioned in Song of Solomon 2:1 – “I am a rose of Sharon (another Biblical flower outside of my range!), a lily of the valley.” Be aware that the Lily-of-the-Valley is another poisonous plant.

Finally, there is the ever popular “Bleeding Heart,” with its drooping branches of heart-shaped flowers with a droplet of blood suspended from it. To me, it’s meaningful because it reminds me how Jesus bled upon the cross for my sins.

Sun Loving Plants

In my front sunny garden, I have “Blazing Star” or liatris. This plant has a clump of grass like leaves that send out tall spikes of lavender or white fuzzy flowers and grows very well in our area. The name is a reference to the star of Bethlehem which led the Magi to Jesus (Matthew 2:9), “They went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was!”

A biennial easy to grow from seed in a sunny location is “Judas’ Penny,” also called honesty plant or money plant.

When you rub off the husk of the seed pod after blooming, you are left with a white, opaque round disc which looks much like a coin. They are often used in dry-flower arrangements. The name “Judas’ Penny” is a reference to the Apostle Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16), “Then one of the twelve – the one called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him (Jesus) over to you?’ So they counted out for him 30 silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”

Another dainty biennial that blooms all spring long in sun or part shade is the “Forget-Me-Not.” This is a low-growing filler plant that easily seeds itself with clusters of tiny blue flowers and looks particularly lovely planted amongst tulips and daffodils. For me, this flower is a reminder that God will never forget about us, as it says in Isaiah 49:15-16, “Can a mother forget a child at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”.

Another perennial often used in dry-flower arrangements is the “Pearly

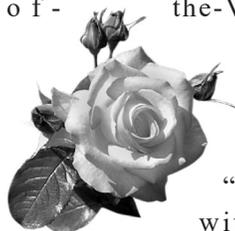
Everlasting,” familiar to many people because it grows wild by our roadsides although a hybridized variety is available for gardens. The white, papery little flowers “last forever,” just as we will have everlasting life if we believe in Jesus. Jesus himself says in John 6:47, “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”

Annual Plants

Some of my favourite annuals are climbing vines. They are easy to grow from seed in rich soil, providing they have a hot summer and lots of sun. “Cathedral Bells” is a great annual climber, easily reaching great heights with large white or violet bell-shaped flowers in the summer with a honey scent. They are also called Cup and Saucer vines. For earlier bloom, they can be started indoors in peat pots.

Another climber I love is the “Morning Glory – Heavenly Blue.” It enjoys the sun and heat as well, clambering up a trellis in late summer and blessing us with oversized, sky-blue trumpet-shaped flowers that are truly “heavenly.” The flowers last only a day, but don’t worry, buds are produced in profusion until frost.

Last, but not least, you must try the vining “Passion Flower.” It grows quickly in full sun and has the most perfect flowers, and if left to go to seed, produces an edible fruit, the passion fruit that is popular in fruit salads and can be squeezed into juice. The flowers come in a variety of colours, the most popular being blue. Although its name may sound romantic, it is a reference to the passion or suffering of Christ. The name was given by Spanish priests in South America who saw the beautiful flowers as the symbols of the instruments of Christ’s passion. The five petals and five sepals (which are



Other plants that readers may like to try in warmer zones:

- Aaron’s Rod (a yellow lupin)
- Angels’ Trumpet (Datura)
- Burning Bush
- Bishop’s Cap (Mitrewort)
- Easter Lily
- Joseph’s Coat
- Keys of Heaven (Valerian)
- Maltese Cross
- Pasque Flower (anemone)
- Star of Bethlehem (spring bulb)
- Yellow Archangel.

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Garden, continued

similar in appearance to petals) represent the disciples without Peter and Judas. The inner ring of filaments is the crown of thorns placed on Christ's head, the five stamens are the five wounds He suffered and the three stigmas are the three nails. The tendrils resemble the whips used to scourge Christ, and the lobed leaves look similar to the clutching hands of the soldiers. This plant is also referred to as the "Crucifixion Flower."

There are so many more flowers with Biblical or spiritual names that do not grow in our planting zone (2b) but I'm adventurous and try to push the boundaries. Most survive, some don't. But it's such fun to try! Be inspired to try a spiritual garden of your own, where you can commune with the Lord and be present in His amazing creation!

Raija Simmons is a member of Faith Lutheran Ladies Guild, Ignace, Ontario. This article was originally written as a devotion for a monthly outreach lunch directed toward women who are "new" and searching Christians.

