



## Would Valentine’s Day exist without the Red Rose?

By: UC Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe



Valentine’s Day is upon us, and traditionally, cut flowers have been a means to demonstrate one's affection for another. Every year on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February millions give roses (primarily red) to loved ones, friends and family members.

One of the reasons for giving roses on Valentine’s Day has to do with a historical mechanism of communication. Floriography, the nonverbal means of communication using flowers. Historically, flowers were used to show someone your true emotions at a time when it wasn’t suitable for people to be gushing over one another publicly. For a long time, floriography was the only means to demonstrate your emotions for loved ones. For example, in this language of flowers, giving someone a yellow carnation meant they'd disappointed you and giving someone a purple hyacinth meant you were sorry and begging to be forgiven.



The symbolism of a rose, true love, of course! This seems obvious but how did the red rose become associated with true love. One affiliation of the rose is that with Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In most iconography of Aphrodite, she is adorned with roses around her head, feet, and neck. In Greek mythology, it is said that rose bushes grew from the ground through Aphrodite's tears and the blood of her lover, Adonis.

Roses have had a long history of symbolism in many religions. The rose has also been depicted as miracles and ultimate sacrifice “of love” in countless artworks. Interestingly, the term “sub rosa” means under the rose and comes from the practice of

Romans hanging roses above meeting tables. It was understood that anything said at this table, beneath the hanging roses, was forbidden to be repeated elsewhere.

Roses especially red ones are a multi-billion dollar industry. Don’t get me wrong they are a beautiful flower. My personal color preference is yellow since they make me feel like sunshine something we all hope for in mid-February. On a side note, yellow roses historically represented jealousy while presently they symbolize friendship and joy. I prefer contemporary meaning. If the red rose represents the emotion that you are trying to demonstrate this Valentine’s Day here are a few tips on how to care for the cut varieties. #1 - Always use fresh water and a clean vase. #2 - Re-cut the flower stems. #3 - Remove the leaves below the waterline. #4 - Make sure to top the water off daily and #5 - Enjoy!

On the other hand, if you are haven't decided on the gift of roses this Valentine's Day you might want to consider what additional nonverbal communication you are making concerning climate change. Roses travel quite a distance to make it to the US in the middle of winter. Even though the center of the US rose industry is right here in California, there is still a high probability that those roses came from elsewhere. Most roses that we purchase at the florists or supermarket are flown in from Latin America, specifically the sunny, mountainous regions of Columbia and Ecuador.

The Netherlands is the world's largest exporter of cut flowers or floriculture. Columbia is the second-largest exporter of cut flowers (and has been for over 40 years). According to the Washington Post, Colombia alone shipped more than 4 billion flowers in 2017. Valentine's Day makes up more than one-fifth of the country's rose growers' annual revenue.

Climate certainly plays a role in the Andean nations' dominance. Even California, the leading producer of domestic roses, isn't always warm enough to produce the volume of roses shoppers have come to expect around Valentine's Day. But climatic differences don't tell the whole story. There's the fact that labor costs are much lower in Colombia and Ecuador. Want to know more about how cartel boss Pablo Escobar had a direct effect on the rose trade check out the Washington Post article:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/02/10/feature/colombia-rose-trade-industry-valentines-day/>

Maybe now you are rethinking roses... We do have a native rose to our area, the woods rose. We've included information on how to care for them in this newsletter. Or consider giving a house plant. House plants are a great option to bring some beauty into your Tahoe winter homes. House plants, or indoor plants (although still may originally come from quite far away) may be more sustainable than cut flowers.

They can be beautiful and many of them do have blooming flowers. It's the gift that will keep on giving - African violets, bromeliads, cyclamens, geraniums, peace lilies, kalanchoe, oxalis, Christmas cactus, and orchids are just a few.



**Bromeliad**- are related to the pineapple family, they are drought tolerant and require minimal care. They like bright light without direct sunlight, like humidity, do not water frequently - let the soil go dry between watering. The Bromeliad can add contrast, color and beauty within the home.



**Kalanchoe**- Tropical succulent plant, prefer bright, sunny locations, especially during the summer growing season. During the winter consider a south-facing window. Water moderately throughout the summer and reduce watering in the winter, let the soil surface dry out between each watering. In the winter, the plant can almost dry out, they thrive in the low humidity of winter households, watch the fleshy leaves for signs of water distress.



**African Violets** - one of the best indoor flowering plants for growing under lights; it needs 16-18 hours of bright indirect light each day. Keep the soil moist and use room temperature water. African violets are tender and beautiful flowers that can come in a variety of shades. They definitely can bring some brightness inside in the middle of winter.



**Geranium**- Easy to grow, colorful and exude a beautiful fragrance. Allow soil to dry to some extent between each watering, then water thoroughly. During the winter, water much less, but do not let the roots dry out entirely. Geraniums do best when given a period of dormancy through the winter months, during which they use less water and do not grow much. To encourage blooming, deadhead spent flowers.

Regardless of what you decide, cut flowers, or a potted plant, flowers are a beautiful gift to show someone you care. We may be a little biased since we love plants so much but we think that they are a perfect way to show someone your affection and we do think that Valentine's Day would exist with (and without) the rose.

Over the past few years, Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe have written a few articles that are relevant to this piece. We invite you to check them out.

- Floriography: Flower Symbolism: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/mglaketahoe/files/287974.pdf>
- Floriography of the Tallac Site: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/mglaketahoe/files/287974.pdf>
- Enjoy Gesneriads! African violet: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/mglaketahoe/files/297556.pdf>

Additional information on how to care for cut flowers check out one of these articles.

[https://ucanr.edu/sites/EH\\_RIC/newsletters/Vol2\\_No4\\_Fall\\_199837626.pdf](https://ucanr.edu/sites/EH_RIC/newsletters/Vol2_No4_Fall_199837626.pdf)

<https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8113.pdf>

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-caring-valentines-day-flowers>

### **Resources and Additional Articles**

<https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/why-you-shouldnt-get-mom-roses-year>

<file:///C:/Users/mastergardener/Desktop/RG0325.pdf>

<https://www.rosefarm.com/blog/more-rose-number-symbolism/>

<https://www.learnreligions.com/sacred-roses-spiritual-symbolism-rose-123989>

<https://www.proflowers.com/blog/the-history-of-valentines-day>

<https://www.teleflora.com/floral-facts/rose-color-meaning>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/02/10/feature/colombia-rose-trade-industry-valentines-day/>