

# Holiday Flowers

## From Easter to Memorial Day

BY PAT MILLER '93



The traditional Easter flower is the white lily (*Lilium longiflorum*), a symbol of purity, hope, new life and a religious symbol since the birth of Christianity. The most famous biblical reference is Jesus telling his followers, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: They toil not, neither do they spin; and yet . . .

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Today many churches commemorate the resurrection by adorning their altars with white lilies.

Officially discovered in 1777 by Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg in Japan, the flower made its way to England in 1819 and then arrived at Bermuda in the mid-1800s. Named the "Bermuda lily," it was eventually changed to "Easter lily" when the spring-blooming flower was brought to Philadelphia and popularized as an Easter blossom. A virus destroyed the plant's production on Bermuda, making Japan the flower's largest producer once again. It wasn't until World War I that the Easter lily started being produced in the United States. When a soldier named Louis Houghton first saw the flower in 1919, he was so captivated that he brought some bulbs back to home to Oregon and gave the lilies to friends, who also happened to be horticulture experts. As a result, large-scale production of the flower spread across the West Coast, and by 1945, more than 1,000 growers in Oregon and California were producing the bulbs, earning the region the title of "Easter Lily Capitol of the World." Easter lilies are now one of the most popular potted plants in the country, ranking with poinsettias, mums and azaleas.

### *Eager to Please*

Spring Beauty's blooms only last a few days. Deperate for pollinators, it freely offers nectar in an open cup, which is accessible to any insect, even freeloaders like ants, who may move in to rob the nectar.



Another popular spring holiday is Mother's Day, celebrated in the United States and Canada on the second Sunday in May. The holiday was first celebrated in 1908, after a long campaign to honor Anna Reeves Jarvis, a social worker and peace activist.



The role of the carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) in Mother's Day began after Anna's death when her daughter, Anna Jarvis, sent 500 carnations to St. Andrew's Methodist Church in West Virginia in memory of her mother, who loved the flowers. People were so impressed by this act of love that they lobbied with Anna for Mother's Day to be made an official holiday by President Woodrow Wilson. Since its official declaration in 1914, giving flowers, especially carnations, for Mother's Day has become a traditional way for people to express gratitude for their mothers' care, love and kindness.

Memorial Day was established as a time to remember those who died while serving in the country's military. The holiday, observed on the last Monday in May, originated as Decoration Day after the American Civil War. Although decorating soldiers' graves with flowers is an ancient custom, the huge numbers of soldiers that died on both sides of the Civil War led to a cultural phenomenon, the formal practice of grave decoration followed by the establishment of national cemeteries.



The common or field poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) became a symbol of Memorial Day after the First World War when Lieutenant Colonel John McCrea, a doctor with the Canadian forces, wrote the poem, "In Flanders Fields." Its opening lines refer to the many poppies that were the first flowers to grow in the churned-up earth of soldiers' graves in Flanders, Belgium. The battle damage done to the fields greatly increased the soil's lime content, leaving the poppy as one of the few plants to grow in the region. Inspired by McCrea's poem, Moina Michael, a professor at the University of Georgia and a YMCA volunteer, published a poem of her own called *We Shall Keep the Faith*. In tribute to *In Flanders Fields*, Michael vowed to always wear a red poppy, and in 1918, she distributed 25 poppies at a YWCA Overseas War Secretaries' conference. Michaels campaigned to have the flower adopted as a national symbol of remembrance, and in 1920, the National American Legion adopted the remembrance, or artificial, poppy as its official symbol.

### Reference:

Adapted from Wikipedia