

## MONTHLY COLUMN FOR SOAP, PERFUMERY & COSMETICS

**Anthony C. Dweck**  
**Consultant**

### **The Language of Flowers**

It is February, a wonderful period in our calendar because it only has twenty eight days and more importantly it is the month of Valentine's Day. It is a time of symbolism and so it seemed appropriate to look at the symbolic meaning of plants.

The earliest meanings date back to a time when knights needed to distinguish themselves in combat from their enemies and so decorated their shields and armour with symbols that would be easily recognised by their own troops in the heat of battle.

The language of flowers probably even predates this use and we have the Victorians to thank for reintroducing and recording the meanings. Imagine that you wanted to send a message and could not write, what better way than to send a posy of flowers, each containing its own meaning.

Imagine a scenario in this 15<sup>th</sup> century cosmetics business

The Chemist has not completed a difficult project on time, the launch will not run to schedule and the Marketing Director has reprimanded his/her manager.

### **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

White Catchfly (betrayed), Bugloss (falsehood), Apocynum (deceit), Almond (stupidity), Begonia (dark thoughts), Barberry (sourness and ill-temper), Basil (I dislike you intensely), Blackthorn (problems lie ahead), and Tansy (I declare war against you).

The chemist is not pleased, but does not want to make matters any worse

### **Floral Memorandum from the Chemist to the Marketing Manager**

Azalea (avoid extremes of speech and action), Burdock (I shall not be discouraged), Galdiolus (your slights have wounded me), Gentian (you are unjust), Hydrangea (you change your mind too often), Hellebore (do not believe anything until you have heard my explanation), Pimpernel (suggest when and where to meet).

The marketer, who has cooled off, sends the following reply.

## **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

Aster (I am sorry for my rashness, take it not to heart), Agrimony (gratitude), Pink Geranium (I await your explanation), Bell Flower (meet me tomorrow morning).

They have a meeting to discuss the project and positive progress is made. The chemist re-evaluates the project and puts in some extra time on the bench.

## **Floral Memorandum from the Chemist to the Marketing Manager**

Flowering almond (hope), Bittersweet (I am sincere), Daisy (await my answer in a few days), White geranium (my mind is not made up), Honesty (I have told you everything), Love-in-a-Mist (your message was unclear), Angelica (inspiration) and Sweet Sultan (a token to wish you joy).

The marketer is pleased with the first submission and sends the following message.

## **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

White Canterbury Bell (Your gift arrived and gave great pleasure), Campanula (gratitude), Agrimony (please accept my thanks), Creeping Cerebus (modest genius), Chinese Chrysanthemum (cheerfulness under adversity), White Chrysanthemum (I trust you completely), Clematis (I admire your wit and cleverness), Hollyhock (together we can achieve much), Mullein (come, let us be friends) and Celandine (joys to come).

Meanwhile the chemist has made excellent progress in the project and has numerous prototypes to show.

## **Floral Memorandum from the Chemist to the Marketing Manager**

Jacob's Ladder (come down), Mistletoe (I surmount difficulties), Palm (victory), Spruce Pine (hope in adversity), Plane tree (genius), Truffle (surprise), Hollyhock (together we can achieve much) and Coronella (success crown your wishes). P.S. Magnolia (be not disheartened, better days are due).

The marketing department is well pleased and reply with the following message

## **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

Corn Straw (agreement), Buttercup (your splendour shines like the sun), Cherry Blossom (may

our friendship wax firm and strong), and Cineraria (I enjoy being in your company).

The chemist greatly encouraged replies

### **Floral Memorandum from the Chemist to the Marketing Manager**

Campion (though of humble station, I should like to know you better), Red Columbine (anxious and trembling), White Lily (I kiss your fingertips), Mistletoe (I send you kisses galore), and Thyme (I need a good home-maker like you.).

### **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

Borage (your attentions only embarrass me), Currant (you and I have nothing in common), Daffodil (I do not share your feelings), White dahlia (keep away), and Yellow dahlia (your attentions are not to my liking). Dandelion (I find your presumption laughable), Guelder Rose (I want a youthful lover, not one already in his dotage), and Mint (find a spouse of your own age and background).

### **Floral Memorandum from the Chemist to the Marketing Manager**

Everlasting flower (Farewell, as you request it, leave I must. But I shall never forget you), Hawthorn (despite your answer, I shall strive for your love), Heliotrope (you are the light of my life), Purple Iris (my heart is aflame) and Ivy (I want you above all else). P.S. Love Lies Bleeding (Your refusal robs life of all meaning).

### **Floral Memorandum from the Marketing Manager to the Chemist**

Primrose (I may learn to love you, it's too soon to tell), Tuberose (love's flame has singed my wings), Aster (I am sorry for my rashness, take it not to heart) and Bramble (I was too hasty. please excuse me). P.S. Gentian (I love you best when you are sad!).

And so as feelings blossom between these two lovers we quietly slip away to leave them to continue their courtship.....

At a time when the emphasis is on claim substantiation and the functionality of our products, would it not be a refreshing change to put the romance back in our products and to use some of the symbolic meanings?

This symbolism crops up in many cultures and we could consider India's most sacred plant – the Lotus (*Nymphaeae lotus*) – which means spiritual unfolding and as it is linked with Lakshmi (the

goddess of prosperity) also represent abundance.

In many parts of India, the night before the wedding is known as "*Night of Henna*", when the bride decorates the palms and soles of her feet in floral and fertility designs with a paste made from powdered henna leaves. The paste is also used in some regions to stain the palms of the bridegroom, which when washed away leaves a red stain that is said to symbolise the deep love between husband and wife.

Happy Valentine's Day!