Foreword

Floral arrangements are a vision of comfort at funerals, a beautiful reminder of the love surrounding the deceased as well as the bereaved. Flowers can also reflect the life and legacy of the person who has passed away.

Over the years, different types of blooms have taken on special symbolic meanings. We’ve created a guide to the meanings behind various sympathy flowers in the hope that it will help you to express your feelings at a time when words often feel inadequate.

Sincerely,
Legacy.com

Contents

4 Azalea
6 Baby’s Breath
8 Carnation
10 Chrysanthemum
12 Fern
14 Forget Me Not
16 Gladiolus
18 Hydrangea
20 Iris
22 Lily
24 Orchid
26 Rose
28 Herbs and Aromatics
30 Honoring a Life Story with Custom Arrangements
Azalea

The azalea is the flower that ushers in springtime in the southern United States. That’s one reason it’s so closely associated with beauty and rebirth. These blooms are often given as a symbolic message to, “Take care of yourself,” which is an important sentiment to extend to the bereaved.

Little-Known fact:
Azaleas are celebrated in festivals throughout the world, especially the U.S. and Asia. In Chinese culture, the azalea is known as the “thinking of home bush” and was immortalized in the poetry of a famous poet during the Tang dynasty.
Baby’s Breath

As its name suggests, baby’s breath represents innocence and purity of heart. Though the small white blossoms are used to honor loved ones of all ages, they’re particularly appropriate after the death of a child.

Little-Known Fact:
The scientific name for baby’s breath is Gypsophila, which means “chalk-loving.” It’s a fitting name, since the flowers thrive in dry, sandy and stony soils.
Carnation

Carnations are one of the flowers most closely associated with condolences. Pink carnations in funeral arrangements denote lasting friendship and undying remembrance.

Little-Known Fact:

Wearing a carnation on Mother’s Day conveys a connection to the wearer’s mother. That maternal connection carries over into flower arrangements for the funeral of a mother or grandmother.
Chrysanthemum

Cultures throughout the world associate chrysanthemums with sympathy and grief. In Europe, the flowers are commonly used in funeral arrangements and placed on graves. In China, Korea and Japan, white chrysanthemums symbolize grief.

Little-Known Fact:

Chrysanthemums are one of the oldest known flowers, first cultivated in China in the 15th century B.C.
Fern

Although ferns aren’t commonly seen in funeral arrangements, they can be a meaningful addition. Symbolic of sincerity and sorrow, they also suggest rebirth as their spiral-shaped shoots unfurl slowly into the mature frond.

Little-Known Fact:
There’s an extraordinary amount of diversity in the world of ferns – some species grow just a fraction of an inch tall while others tower more than 30 feet high.
Forget-Me-Not

Forget-Me-Nots represent true love and the hope of being remembered forever. In 15th-century Germany, women often wore the flower as a sign of faithfulness and enduring love.

A spouse or significant other may choose to include them in their partner’s arrangement as a symbol of devotion.

Little-Known Fact:

According to German legend, a knight was walking with his lady along the riverside. He picked a bouquet of flowers to present to her, but the weight of his armor caused him to fall into the water. As he was drowning, he threw the bouquet to his lover and shouted, “Forget me not.”
Gladiolus

When featured in funeral arrangements, the gladiolus expresses respect for the deceased’s integrity and strength of character. The connection to strength dates back to ancient Rome, when they were associated with gladiators. The pointed leaves are reminiscent of a sword (“gladius” in Latin).

Little-Known Fact:

Gladioli have historically been used for medical purposes, including treating colic in babies.
Hydrangea

The hydrangea represents sincere and heartfelt emotion. Its flowers bloom seasonally, so if planted, it can serve as an ongoing reminder of the giver’s love and support.

Little-Known Fact:

The name hydrangea comes from the Greek words for “water” and “vessel.” The flower’s ocean-blue color – and need for copious amounts of water – explain why.
Iris

Symbols of faith, admiration and friendship, irises were planted on graves in ancient Greece with the hope of summoning the goddess Iris to guide souls to the afterlife. The flowers bloom in more than 200 varieties and a rainbow of colors.

Little-Known Fact:

A stylized iris became the symbol of the French monarchy, the fleur-de-lis.
Lily

White lilies are the quintessential sympathy flower. They symbolize a return to innocence for the deceased. Catholics associate the fragrant flowers with the Virgin Mary and resurrection.

Little-Known Fact:

Almost all varieties of white lilies will fill the room with a sweet, heady fragrance, but most colorful varieties have a light scent (or no scent at all).
Orchid

Orchids are treasured for their exquisite beauty and because they keep blooming long after other arrangements have withered. Because of their longevity, they’re associated with everlasting love — the kind that stays strong even after someone is gone.

Little-Known Fact:

Although most commercial orchids are tropical varieties, species of orchids can be found as far north as the Arctic and as far south as the Patagonia region of Argentina.
Rose

No flower is more closely associated with love than a rose. In funeral arrangements, they can convey different types of love depending on their colors. Red petals represent romantic love; pink indicate deep appreciation; and yellow honor a strong friendship. Joe DiMaggio sent red roses to ex-wife Marilyn Monroe’s grave twice a week for more than 20 years.

Little-Known Fact:
The age of a rose can also convey special meaning. Unopened rosebuds echo the sorrow of losing a young child, while full blooms may denote the loss of someone in the prime of life.
Herbs & Aromatics

Perhaps a loved one enjoyed cooking with rosemary, or always kept a lavender-scented candle flickering in their home. Including these scents in a funeral arrangement can link us directly to those fond memories. Here are a few aromatics to consider (plus the meanings they’re commonly associated with).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chamomile</td>
<td>Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavender</td>
<td>Devotion and virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>Remembrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarragon</td>
<td>Lasting interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thyme</td>
<td>Courage and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrow</td>
<td>Undying love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Honoring a Life Story with Custom Arrangements

Florists and funeral directors often work closely with families to create custom arrangements honoring an individual’s life and legacy.

“My grandfather passed away in the fall of 2006 and our family worked closely with the florist on a custom arrangement for his casket, which had an autumn harvest feel. The flowers were mostly orange with blue irises: the colors of Auburn University, his alma mater – thanks to the GI Bill, he was the first in his family to graduate from college. Sprays of wheat and oak leaves were included because ‘he loved the land’ and had been a farmer much of his life.”

“When a young man passed away after a battle with leukemia, his family turned to his passions and achievements for inspiration. An Eagle Scout and longtime camp counselor, he loved the outdoors and spent as much time as he could in the north woods. His family chose flowers that included cut cedar for the funeral so that as people passed the casket, they could smell the woods he loved.”
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