

Flowers and plants

Flowers and plants have a wide variety of meanings and significance in many religions. They are often linked to all that is seen as good and correct in the world, for example: love, virtue, peace, hope and purity.

Flowers are things of beauty. They are used to decorate buildings and adorn shrines, reminding us of God’s creation. Here are some examples:

At the Balaji Hindu temple, the ancient Indian craft of garland making is practised.

The flower garlands are a symbol of respect towards the

deities. The main Hindu prayer rites are called **Puja** which means ‘flower act’. It is believed that the deities will respond by granting blessings such as good health, wealth and prosperity. Here the garlands are decorating the shrine of Lord Venkateswara.



Piers Wolf



Garland maker at Balaji Temple



A beautiful arrangement in a Christian church.

On a Buddhist shrine (below) flowers represent generosity and show the beauty of knowledge and wisdom. Unlike other faiths, some flowers are left to die on the shrine to remind us that life is not permanent.



Piers Wolf

In the Sikh gurdwara, the raised platform, where the Guru Granth Sahib is recited, is decorated with flowers, often in colours which represent the Sikh faith (yellow, orange and white).



A Murtagh

Activities:

A wide range of suggestions for decorative arts, design and research activities relating to flowers and plants are given.

It is important for children to respect different faiths by learning more about the historical and cultural differences.

Apart from encouraging children to be curious and reflective, it is hoped that children will see similarities between religions and celebrate differences.

In Islam plants and flowers have always been important in Islamic culture.

Islam forbids images of living creatures but not flowers and plants. The shapes and patterns of flowers and plants, curling and twisting, are combined with geometric shapes and used for decoration on textiles, pottery, tiles and walls of buildings. (See *Circles and Patterns : Activity Red 4* for more information.)



Design a pattern which could be used as a tile or to decorate a vase.



Islamic Gardens

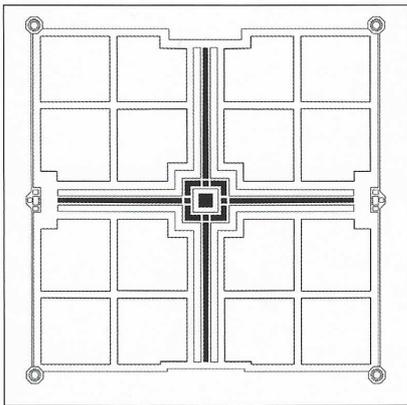
Muslims enjoy the soothing influence of flowing water, greenery and colourful flowers. In hot climates, man-made gardens became a feature in the homes of rich people, providing a cool and shady place to enjoy.

Some Islamic gardens have a special shape. The 4 fold green and shady *Chahar-bagh* or *Paradise Garden* is found across the world. The number 4 is important in its design. It represents:

Four directions: north, south, east and west

Four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter

Four elements: water, air, earth and fire.



From *Discovering Islamic Art* p 43



Usually four water channels divide up the garden with a fountain or pool in the middle. Water and shade provide respite from the hot and scorched environment. The plants also provide food and many have medicinal use.

Explore and design a four fold Islamic garden.

For more information and ideas on Islamic patterns see *Circles and Patterns Activity Red 4* and *Discovering Islamic Art* by Mary Beardwood, Medina Publishing ISBN 9781909330040. Items from 'Discovering Islamic Art' have been reproduced with kind permission from Peter Harrigan, Director, Medina Publishing.

Buddhist gardens

Most Buddhist temples are surrounded by a garden which reflects peace, calmness, goodness and respect for all living things. There are often paths for a meditative walk with shade created by trees. The Lord Buddha sat under a tree to meditate and to teach. (*Read the story of Lord Buddha: Stories to Share: Activity Green 2*).

Dry Zen Buddhist gardens have white raked gravel with larger groups of stones carefully arranged in a pleasing design.



Jewish gardens

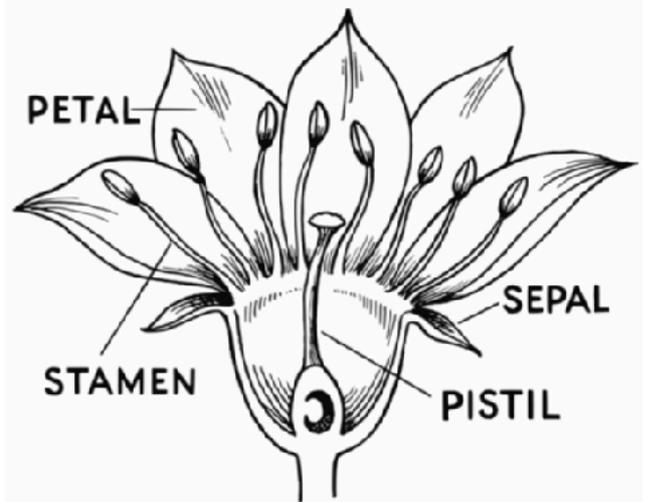
Like Buddhist gardens, they are a place for peaceful contemplation and meditation, with seats to rest and reflect.

Looking closely at some flower heads

Flowers heads are so beautiful. Each flower head has several different parts.

Find a flower to draw in your sketch book. Even a Daisy or a Dandelion are fascinating. Look closely at the parts. Each has a different name.

Can you find the petals, the sepals, the stamen and the pistil?



Here are some flowers which have special significance in religions.



Passion flower - In the Christian religion, the Passion flower is a symbol of Christ's crucifixion. The **stamens** resemble a crown of thorns.



The red rose is a symbol of deep love.

The Rose is a special symbol in many religions.

In **Islam** the Rose is the flower of Heaven.

In **Judaism**, the Rose is associated with the festival of Shavuot, which commemorates God giving the Torah (the Holy Book) to Moses. The way in which the petals open suggests the process of revelation.

Christians see the rose as a symbol of Paradise that reflects God.

Hindus and Buddhists see the rose as a symbol of joy.



The Lotus Flower is another important symbol in several religions.

The Lotus Flower is the national flower of India. It grows in muddy waters and rises above the surface to open into a beautiful flower.

Sikhism

The Lotus Flower grows out of muddy waters reaching towards the light. It represents beauty, purity and strength.



Hinduism

The Lotus Flower is linked to some of the major deities such as Brahma - the creator, Lakshmi the goddess of wealth and prosperity and Vishnu - the preserver.

Buddhism

The Lotus flower represents purity of body, mind and speech. Growing into a lovely flower out of muddy waters tells Buddhists that they should strive for enlightenment by opening their minds to new ideas and understanding. Buddhists' gardens often have a peaceful pond with floating Lotus blooms. Lord Buddha is often shown seated on a Lotus Flower.

You might like to look at how famous artists have drawn and painted flowers. Look very carefully at how Claude Monet has painted a Lotus flower. Draw and paint one.

Flowers for well being and welcome

Giving flowers to people shows that you care. Although flowers are important symbols across the globe, different religions have different customs. It is important for us to understand and respect the differences.

For example, Hindus and Sikhs take flowers to the household where they are celebrating Diwali, the festival of lights. At the entrance to the household, there is likely to be Rangoli.



Rangoli is an ancient Indian art form. Circular patterns, often based on flowers, are created on the floor or tabletop using materials such as flower petals, dry rice, flour, coloured sand and stones.

The purpose of Rangoli is to welcome the goddess Lakshmi to the household to bring prosperity and good luck.

Create a Rangoli design based on a flower for a Diwali celebration. Plenty of help is available online.

See Circles and Patterns, Activities Red 4, (Page 2 for further information and Page 7 for a template.)

<https://birmingham-faith-visits.theartssociety.org/>

Flowers for weddings

Wedding couples may wear garlands or carry bouquets or have a button hole pinned to their clothes.



Henna is commonly used in religions all round the world especially in Islam and Indian religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism. On the night before a wedding, a Mehndi ceremony takes place. The bride's hands and feet are decorated with the dark dye of the henna plant as a symbol of good fortune, happiness and fertility.



Draw round your hand and create a Mehndi design for your hand.

Flowers and plants for medicinal use and natural dyes

For thousands of years, wild plants and vegetables have been used for food, for remedies and for natural dyes. They are mentioned in the holy scriptures of many religions.



Ginger



Cumin



Fennel



Beetroot

Read about how Buddhist monks dye cloth for their robes. See the illustrated guide for the Buddhist temple. <https://birmingham-faith-visits.theartssociety.org>

Have fun with experimenting with natural dyes. Visit: <https://www.accessart.org.uk/tie-dye/>



Garlic



Dates



Olives



Pomegranate

Flowers as symbols of remembrance.

When people are sad because someone has died, it is known as mourning or grieving. Flowers are a common symbol of mourning across the world but not in every faith. For example, although trees and plants are important to Jews, flowers are a symbol of celebration so they are not given at funerals. Some religions use flowers and other green leaves arranged in a circular wreath.

A circle has no beginning and no end and represents eternal life.



Why do we hang a wreath for a Christmas decoration?

Find out about the special symbol of a Poppy wreath.



Research the use of flowers for different religious communities.



Roadside memorial Bunches of flowers are often placed as a marker that shows where a person has died to show respect.

Placing flowers when someone has died can be a source of comfort to people who are grieving.



Christian communities often put flowers or a wreath on a coffin.



Jackie Nash: Mosaic artist see Red 3

Members of a Birmingham community made a flower to remember a loved one. These became a memorial mosaic on the wall of a medical centre.

You might like to make a flower memorial frieze for the classroom.

Tree of Life

From ancient times, trees have been a symbol of life, strength and growth. A majestic tree has the power to express our deepest feelings.



With branches that reach skywards and roots that extend even further than the crown of the tree, the tree is a symbol of connecting the spiritual (sky) and the worldly (earth).



A 'Family tree' is a way to visualise a family.

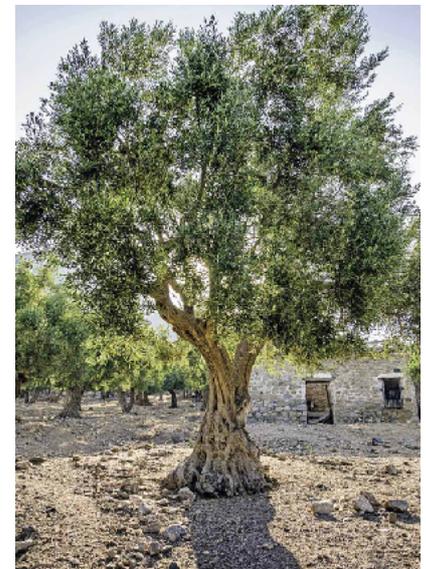


Since the times of the ancient Greeks, the olive tree- especially the olive branch- became a symbol of peace and friendship.

Trees play an important part in many stories in the Torah, the Jewish holy book. An entire Jewish holiday is given to trees.

In 2019, Sikhs around the world planted a million trees as a gift to the planet to mark the 550th birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

Why are trees important for our climate?



An Olive tree.



In a Birmingham synagogue, a tree of remembrance commemorates some loved ones who were killed in the Holocaust between 1941 and 1945.



Activities - Leaves from trees may be used for printing.
Using sketch books and pencils, draw a tree.
There are many arts activities about trees online.

See: accessart.org.uk

This activity is part of a pack of curriculum enrichment activities linked to

<https://birmingham-faith-visits.theartssociety.org/>