

# Flowers in Greek Mythology



Everybody knows how rich and exciting Greek Mythology is. Everybody also knows how rich and exciting Greek Flora is. Find out some of the famous Greek myths flower inspired. Find out how feelings and passions were mixed together with flowers to make wonderful stories still famous in nowadays.



**Anemone:** The name of the plant is directly linked to the well known ancient erotic myth of Adonis and Aphrodite (Venus). It has been inspired great poets like Ovidius or, much later, Shakespeare, to compose hymns dedicated to love. According to this myth, while Adonis was hunting in the forest, the ex-lover of Aphrodite, Ares, disguised himself as a wild boar and attacked Adonis causing him lethal injuries. Aphrodite heard the groans of Adonis and rushed to him, but it was too late.

Aphrodite got in her arms the lifeless body of her beloved Adonis and it is said she used nectar in order to spray the wound. The mixture of the nectar and blood sprang a beautiful flower. However, the life of this

beautiful flower doesn't not last. When the wind blows, makes the buds of the plant to bloom and then drifted away. This flower is called Anemone because the wind helps the flowering and its decline.



**Adonis:**It would be an omission if we do not mention that there is a flower named Adonis, which has medicinal properties. According to the myth, this flower is familiar to us as poppy meadows with the beautiful red colour. (Adonis blood).



**Iris:** The flower got its name from the Greek goddess Iris, goddess of the rainbow. Iris was also known to be the messenger of Zeus and Hera and used to take messages from "the eye of Heaven" to earth through the curve of the rainbow. The word iris means "eye of heaven" and it was given to the goddess. Further, this means that each of us carries a piece of heaven.

**Hyacinths:** The Hyacinths was a handsome Spartan youth loved by both Apollo, god of the sun, and Zephyrus, god of the west wind. Both gods competed to gain this handsome youth's attention. According to the myth, while Apollo was teaching the young boy how to throw the discus, the god accidentally killed Hyacinths. But, according to another legend,

because of the fact that Zephyrus was jealous of the youth's love for Apollo, he blew onto the disk by directing him to hit and kill Hyacinth.



However, the truth is that the hyacinth flower we mentioned in this myth is most probably not what we call, as the "modern" hyacinth is not native to Greece. In fact, the myth may not even be the true source of the word "hyacinth," as it has been traced back to even more distant antiquity; a non-Greek language spoken some 4,000 years ago, called 'Thracopelasgian.'



**Narcissus:** Narcissus was an extremely handsome young man. His mother advice him not to give importance to his beady in order to live a long life. if he did not look upon his own beauty. However, Narcissus decided to see his reflection in a water surface. He was so enchanted by his own beauty that he remained there until he languished and died on the banks of the lake. According to another legend, he mistakenly thought that his own reflection was the face of the nymph that inhabited in the lake and he jumped into

the water trying to catch her. The narcissus flower supposedly grew at that spot.





**Crocus:** Crocus was a friend of the Greek god Hermes. One day while the two friends were playing, Hermes accidentally hit and killed his friend. A small flower grew at the place of the accident. Three drops of the unfortunate young man Crocus' blood fell on the centre of the flower and formed the spots on this plant. The plant was named crocus because of this event. According to

another myth, Crocus was a young man who transformed into a flower because of his unfulfilled love for a nymph called Smilax. At the same time, Smilax transformed into a vine-plant (*Smilax aspera*-Sarsparilla).

**Daphne - Laurel:**Daphne was a young beautiful bside, daughter of the river god Penaeus. She was a huntress who dedicated herself to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, and, like the goddess, refused to marry. Although she was pursued by many admirers to get married, she rejected every lover, including the powerful son of Zeus, Apollo. Apollo fell in love with Daphne, and when she rejected him, he pursued her through the forest. Daphne was frightened and prayed to her father for help her. Whereupon her father told her that he would protect her by turning her into a Laurel Tree on the bank of his river (Greek native daphne). When Apollo came looking for Daphne, her father told him that she was transformed into a Laurel tree. Apollo then cut off some branches and made himself a wreath in memory of her beauty and his love for her.



Apollo made laurel his sacred tree. He appropriated the laurel wreath, since then called DAPHNE in Greek, for champions and those who strived for excellence in their chosen fields, i.e. in the ancient Olympic Games all the champions were crowned with a DAPHNE



**Rose:** There are many legends regarding the rose. In Greek mythology, the rose was created by the goddess of flowers, Chloris. One day the goodness Flora found the lifeless body of a nymph in the forest and she turned her into a flower. She called upon Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Dionysus, the god of wine. Aphrodite gave the flower beauty as her gift and Dionysus added nectar to give it a sweet fragrance. Zephyrus, god of the West Wind, blew the clouds away so Apollo, the sun god, could shine and make the flower bloom. That is how the rose was created and rightfully crowned "Queen of Flowers".

**Aster:** Renowned that this kind of flowers began to grow from the tears of Asterea, the Greek goddess of the starry sky (also known as Virgo in Rome), who cried because she saw no stars when she looked down upon the earth.



**Peony:** The famous Peony named by Paionians or paean. It is believed that peony has a deity of treatment since it treated the gos Hades and Ares from injuries. The legend says that specific Paionians was a disciple of Aesculapius, the god of health and medicine. He was once instructed by Leto (Apollo's mother and goddess of fertility) to obtain a magical root growing on Mount Olympus that would soothe the pain of women in childbirth. Asclepius became jealous and threatened to kill his pupil.

Zeus saved Paeon from the wrath of Asclepius by turning him into the peony flower. However, peony seeds were actually used by pregnant



women in ancient times.



**Hellebore:** In Greek mythology, Melampus, the great seer and healer used this plant as a herb to cure the madness of the daughters of the king of Argos, Proetus', and also for other Greek women, who lost their minds and roamed wildly through the mountains and the desert of Tiryns, thinking they were cows. As a result, Melampus and his brother Bias gained a fortune (two thirds of King Proetus' kingdom) becoming the husbands of the

princesses they had cured.



**Achillea:** it took its name from the Homeric hero Achilles. It is said that Achilles was given this plant to his soldiers in order to stop the bleeding from their wounds during the Trojan War. Recent tests on this plant have shown that it does indeed contain chemicals that help blood to clot. It is also called "devil's plaything" because people in the past believed that placing yarrow under their pillow would make them dream of matters of love.

**Agave:** the word "agave" means admirable or noble descent. The plant of Agave came to Greece from Mexico. But its name is Greek and it was probably used because the Greek Agave was one of the "lesser" gods of the Moon, that means that she was one of the faces of the ancient Mother Earth of the Mediterranean; the ground in Jalisco, Mexico, reminds a lot of the ground in Mediterranean countries. Agave was the daughter of Kadmus, King of Thebes, and sister of Semele who was Dionysus' mother. When Semeli was thunder-stricken by Zeus, Agave spread the rumor that Zeus killed her sister because she slandered him.

Later on, Dionysus avenged his mother's death and punished Agave very severely. When Dionysus returned to Thebes, where Pentheus, son of Agave, was the king, he ordered all the women of the town to go to Mount Kithairon and perform rituals in his honour. Pentheus, who did not approve the introduction of such worship, tried to spy on the women. His mother noticed his shadow, but thinking it was a wild animal, she dismembered and devoured him.



**Althaea:** The following legend has no connection to this plant, other than its name. Althea was the wife of Oineus, King of Kalydona, the mother of Deianeira and Meleager. When her son was seven days old, the goddesses of Destiny (the three Moirae) visited her and told her that her baby would die if the torch that was lighted in the house at the moment was burned down to the end. Immediately, Althea put off the torch and hid it in a chest. Meleager grew up and became a famous hero but during the quest

for the Kalydon boar, Meleager killed by mistake his uncles, Althea's brothers. Althea went berserk and threw the torch into the fire. Meleager died immediately. When Althea realized what had happened she hang herself in despair.

**Fir:**In recent times it is used as Christmas tree.



The fir was named by the ancient Greek Pitys and was sacred tree of the god Pan. Pan was once in love with the nymph Pitys. The god of the North wind was also attracted to Pitys, but the nymph chose Pan over him. The North Wind was insulted and he wanted to take revenge so he blew her over a gorge and killed her. Pan found her lifeless body laying in the gorge and turned her into sacred tree, the Fir-tree. Ever since, every time the North wind blows, the nymph cries. Her tears are the pitch droplets that leak out of the fir-cones in autumn.



**Cypress Cyparissus:** According to the tradition, Cyparissus was a handsome young man from the island of Kea, he was the son of Telephus and grand son of Hercules. He was god Apollo's protege as well as of god Zephiros (god of the wind). His beloved company was a holy deer. However on some summer day while the deer was lying in the sun, Cyparissos mistakenly killed it with his spear. The young man was in despair; he wished to be dead as well. He asked the gods a favour; that his tears would roll down eternally. The gods turned him into a cypress tree, the tree of sorrow. Ever since, the cypress tree is considered as armouring tree and has been planted in cemeteries until now.

**Centaurea:** It is said that the plants took its name from the wise Centaur Chiron, mentor of Asclepius, Achilleas, Jason, and Apollo. During the Titan war, Hiron took Hercules' side in his battle against the centaurs. But Hercules, by mistake, wounded Hiron's foot with an arrow full of Hydra poison. Chiron used the "Centaurea" plant in order to heal his wound.



**Orchid:** In Greek mythology, Orchis was the son of a nymph and a satyr. During a celebratory feast for Bacchus, Orchis committed a sacrilege, attempting to rape a priestess. The punishment was to be torn apart by wild beasts, and then he metamorphosed into a slender and modest plant.



Theophrastus was the first of the Western authors mentioned orchids.. Greek women used to use the Orchid roots in order to control the sex of their unborn children with Orchid roots. If the father ate large, new tubers, the child would be male; if the mother ate small tubers, the child would be female.



**Almond tree:** The Greek mythology tells us about a beautiful princess named Phyllis, who was the daughter of a Thracian king. She fell in love with the son of Theseus Dimofontos. The young man had ended up there while sailing home from Troy, and the king gave him part of his kingdom and married him to his daughter.

After some period of time Demophon missed Athens so much and he asked to go home for a while. Phyllis agreed after Demophon had promised her that he would be back soon, and off he sailed. Phyllis was

left waiting for years, but finally died of a broken heart. The gods, out of pity, transformed Phyllis into an almond tree, which became a symbol of hope. When Demonphon returned back home, he found Phyllis as a leafless, flowerless tree. In desperate, he hugged the tree, which suddenly burst into bloom, a demonstration that love can not be defeated by death.