

The rose is one of the oldest flowering plants known. Varieties of it grow wild in many parts of the world and it was early on cultivated by many different peoples. Its flower became a popular motif in art: the rosette, a five-petal design element was used in many different contexts, such as borders on textiles, on architectural relief sculpture, in bas-relief and painted design in pottery and so on.

Ancient roses were varying shades of red to white, had anywhere from 5 to "100" petals (the *rosa centifolia*) and had varying degrees of scent, depending on what type of soil it grew in, what amount of moisture it had and what type of fertilizer was used on it. Gardeners early on learned to graft rose stock onto roots to speed propagation, as the rose is slow to grow from seed.

The scent of and from roses, whether in their natural state on the bush, from its dried petals, or steeped in oil (which perhaps was done as early as the time of the Trojan War) was prized by all. The scent of rose was one of the most common ingredients in perfumes because the plant grew almost everywhere. The rose was often used, in fact, to thin or adulterate more expensive and rarer scents such as balsam. Although many areas of the world were well known for unguents, ointments and perfumes such as Persia, whose people were well-known for their practice of drenching themselves in perfume and were therefore credited with the invention of perfume, it was Campania, especially Praeneste, which was famous for roses. This region was said to have produced more scent than others do oil. Preparation of the soil for roses began in February, although it was the wild rose, not the cultivated one in the Campanian garden, which was said to have produced the most highly scented flower.

The use of the rose is varied. We have already mentioned its use in art, and perfume. Wreathes for the head, worn during fancy dinner parties and even for luxurious wear at home began to become popular at Rome during the period of the Punic Wars. But some people found themselves in trouble for their display of luxury during these austere times. One Lucius Fulvius, a banker, made the mistake of looking out into the Roman Forum during daylight hours from his home while wearing a wreath of rose-petals around his head. People were so outraged that he was dragged off to prison for the duration of the war.

Rose wreathes for the head became so prized and popular that they were later used in the religious rites of the Salii, and only genuine rose petals, preferably imported from exotic locales, such as India and further away, were acceptable. Some physicians, however, claimed that the wearing of rose-petal wreathes was extremely injurious to one's mental health: the scent, so very pleasant, would influence people to their detriment with its luxurious and decadent fumes, and should be especially avoided during drinking parties.

Roses were generally considered quite healthful, despite the protestations of some physicians who were perhaps afraid of people enjoying themselves and thus adversely affecting their health. It was considered an extremely gentle and healthful plant, thorns aside, and known for its astringent and "cooling" properties. A healthful wine was made from its leaves, and dried rose leaves were used as a powder to soothe prickly heat on the inner thighs.

The petals and hips were perhaps most widely used in medicine. Rose petals boiled down until they thickened somewhat produced a juice which could be used as a mouthwash good for the tonsils, gums and mouth generally. Sores of the ears could be alleviated also. Mix this rose juice with a measure of vinegar and it would lessen fever.

They burnt petals and the ash was used by ladies as a good darkener of the eyebrows. The powdered, dried rose petals were used after the bath the way we would talc, and applied to the armpits were said to stop the dreaded BO, such a conversation-stopper at fancy dinner parties when the diners lay in close proximity on the dining couch.

Rose flowers were used as one ingredient in eye-salves, and particularly useful for runny eyes. Female complaints such as menstrual irregularities were calmed by rose flowers. Rose would alleviate a headache, induce sleep and relieve stomach-ache. Rose petals were good for stomach disorders generally, such as dysentery. And, they would even relieve hypochondria, a mental state in which the sufferer believes s/he is ill with one thing or another, even when the rose was applied externally or internally.

The rose hips, ripe ones only (the dark or old ones were said to be possibly injurious) were used to make a liniment for toothache. And you could inhale it to clear your sinuses during cold season or when you got hay-fever. The rose hips could stop diarrhea and hemorrhage.

The rose was extremely useful for whatever ailed you, either a physical or mental affliction. Moreover, it would even help out old Fido: the berries produced by the wild rose could be mixed with bear's grease and applied to your faithful friend to relieve mange.