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Meaning and Symbolism of Flowers and Plants found at the Tallac Estates Part II

The gardens at the Tallac Estates are maintained by volunteers of the Tahoe Heritage Foundation, Forest Service staff and the South Tahoe Garden Club, with some of the plants and trees on-site planted by the original owners of the houses. Maybelle Tevis seems to have been the motivation behind the development of the arboretum, pond (now extensively modified from the original design) and the planting of the redwood trees. Her gardening prowess extended to the other family's properties in Kern County.



Maybelle Romona Tevis



Edith Taylor Pope



Dextra Baldwin

The rhododendrons around the Pope Estate were originally selected by Edith Pope. Mrs. Pope was also extensively involved in the landscaping design of the Burlingame Country Club in Hillsborough (Bay area). Dextra Baldwin is associated with hybrid peonies that were planted along an artificial stream that once ran on her property, and supported the Los Angeles County Arboretum in her later years.

The plants that each of these ladies selected had some meaning to them personally and perhaps were placed to make a statement about the owners of these beautiful estates. The meaning assigned to plants, called floriography was given particular significance in the Victorian era. So here is Part II on the floriography of some of the plants and flowers found at the Tallac Estates.

Astilbe – *Astilbe spp.* Sometimes called False Spirea, or False Goat's Beard. This plant is well suited to areas of high ground water and shade. The plant is native to Asia and North America. Most cultivars are derived from the breeding work of George Arends (1862-1952), A noted German nurseryman. Garden cultivars were introduced into US in late 1800's.

Bishops Weed – *Aegopodium podagraria*. A plant that attracts butterflies, but can be invasive. Young leaves are edible, either as a cooked green or in salads. After flowers form leaves turn pungent and have laxative effect. Reported to treat gout and/or arthritis.

Blue Flax – *Linum lewisii*. A native plant that was used by the Washoe for cordage, nets and string in snow shoes. The flax flower is symbolic of domestication, with a sheath of flax plants being given to newlyweds to honor their new home.

California Goldenrod (Sometimes referred to as Canadian Goldenrod) – *Solidago californica*. The Washoe boiled leaves to make a salve for cuts. Symbolic of precaution and or anticipation.

Cinquefoil – *Potentilla spp.* There are a couple species of these yellow flowers found in the Tahoe basin. Used for alternative treatment of colitis. Symbolizes maternal affection, represents a beloved daughter (child).

Columbine – *Aquilegia formosa*. This striking red flower is found in moist areas and near streams. It is pollinated by hummingbirds, butterflies and long tongued moths. Solitary bees which do not have a long proboscis, simply chew into the nectar spurs located deep in the petals. The Wahoe made a lotion from leaves for sore throats. The red columbine denotes anxiety and trembling, while some in Victorian England thought the flower's meaning was resolve to win.

Foxglove – *Digitalis purpurea*. A poisonous biennial plant. Digitalis refers to finger shaped flower. The flower symbolizes stateliness and/or youth. Alternately its meaning is insincerity, or a wish.

Iris (German or bearded) – *Iris germanica*. These long lived perennials arise from a root-like rhizomes. A common garden flower that was brought to the Virginia colony in the late 1600s. The bearded iris symbolically means flame or heated passion. The Tahoe native, Western Blue Flag iris (*Iris missouriensis*), that is common in meadows is easily cultivated from seed. The common iris (including ours) denotes faith, valor, wisdom and friendship. During Elizabethan times it was a sign that there was a message to be delivered. Iris is the state flower of Tennessee, the flower symbol for the city of New Orleans and the country of France. The Greek messenger god was known as Iris.

Lenten Rose – *Helleborus orientalis*. A key component in a supposed tonic given to King Arthur's wife Guinevere to prevent her from conceiving. Prepared by Arthur's sister. Symbolically means scandal.

Lilacs – *Syringa vulgaris*. An eastern European plant that became popularized in the American colonies beginning in the 1700s. Both Washington and Jefferson were quite proud of their lilacs. The purple lilac symbolizes first love and the white lilac innocence or purity.

Lily of the Valley – Return of happiness, humility

Lupine – This plant in the legume family helps build soil tilth. There are many native lupines as well as important horticultural cultivars. Plants often eaten by gophers who build stashes for the winter. The flower denotes imagination.

Peony – *Paeonia spp.* A favorite of Dextra Baldwin who planted hybrid peonies along an artificial stream near her residence. Peonies represent bashfulness, prosperity and a happy marriage. An alternate meaning is shame.

Rhododendrons - *Rhododendron spp.* The plants at the front of the Pope estate may have been planted by Mrs. Pope. The flower's florigraphic signature is beware, danger or I am dangerous. The closely related azaleas (also in the *Rhododendron* genus) usually has 5 stamens per flower while rhododendrons have 10 (2 per lobe).

Scabiosa – A member of the honeysuckle family this flower is sometimes called the pincushion flower. The pincushion moniker derives from the flower shape and the straight stamens that look somewhat like pins into the pincushion. A symbol of widowhood or grieving.

Virginia creeper – *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*. Native to the eastern United States the Virginia creeper is in the same family as the grape, and the same genus as English ivy. The berries are a food source to birds but are poisonous to humans due the high concentration of oxalic acid. Symbolically same as ivy – Marriage, friendship and fidelity.

The information on floriography and Doctrine of Signs relating to these plants was developed as part of a longer term project at the Tallac Estates to promote and enhance interest in the gardens at the Estates. If Master Gardeners wish to contribute to this effort, your assistance would be welcomed.

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