

Memory Garden
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I recently came across a letter written by my grandmother in 1902 when she was a teenager. In the letter she talks about gathering “four pretty bouquets this morning of sweet peas and candy tuft, moss roses and phlox, poppies and alyssum and nasturtiums” and how pretty they were. And I thought it might be nice to plant a heritage garden this summer in her memory.

Planting a heritage garden can be complicated. All of these flowers are still grown today and a lot of information can be found in Missouri Botanical Gardens Plant Finder. But the specific variety or cultivar may be difficult.

For example sweet peas can be found as an annual, *lathyrus odoratus*, or a perennial, *lathyrus latifolius*. Both plants are climbing vines with fragrant flowers of pink or white.

Chances are my grandmother grew the perennial because she had a perennial bed when I was a child. I remember picking old fashioned buttercups, my favorite because the flowers were so small.

Secondly, new cultivars of plants have been developed. According to the website *Harvesting History*, sweet alyssum had yellow flowers during the Civil War era and the white variety with more fragrant flowers was not cultivated until around 1900. Which one did my grandmother grow?

Then there are names. The moss roses with which I am familiar have the scientific name *portulaca*. They are annual plants that grow 6 to 8 inches tall with pretty round flowers of red, rose, orange, and yellow. But apparently this was also a name used for a Victorian rose, Centifolia roses and damasks.

Candytuft, *iberis sempervirens*, is an evergreen perennial. Missouri Botanical Gardens calls it a subshrub because the stems can become woody if not pruned to ground annually. It has “small pure white 4 petaled flowers in dense, flattened clusters” in late spring. The letter from my grandmother was written in July. Was she calling another plant by this name?

Phlox is also a perennial. Two varieties grown at in the early 1900’s were *phlox paniculata* and *phlox divaricata*, both from Virginia. As *phlox divaricata*, also known as wild sweet William or woodland phlox, blooms in the spring, my grandmother was probably picking *phlox paniculata*, garden phlox, which bloom from July to September. These are tall flowers up to 4 feet in height with clusters of pink-purple to white florets. But we use modern cultivars, bred for powdery mildew resistance.

Nasturtiums, an annual, are native to Peru. They were brought to the United States by the late 1700's and have been grown ever since. The 5 petaled orange flowers grown on long vine-like stalks. The plants are edible except for the roots. Again, there are modern cultivars bred as a dwarf-bush instead of the long viny stalks.

And finally poppy. I remember my mother planting poppies in the back of our house. She loved their bright red orange color. And she mentioned that it is illegal to grow many varieties. In 1900 what variety of poppy did people grow?

I have planted pink geraniums and begonias for many years in honor of my mother-in-law whose favorite color was pink. For my mother I had perennials: lily of the valley, bleeding heart, and daffodils and tulips. Perhaps is it time to add some for my grandmother, phlox, nasturtium, and sweet peas. Not a heritage garden, but a way of remembrance.