



LILY

LILY, name of herbaceous and bulbous flowering plants of the genus *Lilium* L. of *Liliaceae*, the lily family. The lily, called *susan* in Persian and Arabic (Zāhedi, p. 110, Dehḵodā, s.v.), is from Old English *lilie*, Latin *lilia* (plural of *lilium*), cognate with Gk. *leirion* (Skeat, p. 341). Lily is used in the Old Testament to translate Hebrew *šošanna*, a term derived from *Susa*, Persian *Šuš*, the city in southwest Iran that was the ancient capital of the **Elamite** kingdom and **Achaemenid** empire (Elwell, II, p. 1714; Hoiberg and Pappas, XI, p. 416).

Lilium bulbs have numerous imbricate fleshy scales, without a protective outer coating. Lily bulbs may be kept in cool storage for a few months, with special care to keep them fresh and moist (Brenzel, p. 355). The stem is often multi-foliolate at several levels. The flowers are large, funnel-shaped, with six petals and six anthers, borne in racemes or umbellate inflorescences, or even terminal and solitary. They are mostly white, with the inner side being often spotted (Dahlgren, p. 237).

Most species of *Lilium* are ornamentals. *L. candidum* L. or Madonna lily, with pure white and fragrant flowers in wild form, is protected by law in most of its natural geographic distribution (Feinbrum-Dothan, p. 44). Two species of lily exist in Iran and Afghanistan: *L. Ledebourii* (Baker) Boiss. with panicle inflorescence and white tepals, 50-60 mm long, is endemic of **Gilan**, at the southern coast of the **Caspian Sea** (Rechinger et al., CLXV, p. 58). *Pārsā* (p. 187) refers to this species as *L. monadelphum* M. B., *L. polyphyllum* D. Don, with verticillate inflorescence, sordid yellow tepals, 30-40 mm long, which exists



from the western Himalayas to eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rechinger et al., CLXV, p. 59).

Requirements for the culture of lilies are well-drained soil, ample moisture, and adequate sun. While lilies have been traditionally propagated asexually by bulbs, their sexual reproduction by seed and artificial hybridization has enabled breeders to raise hundreds of cultivars. Lilies may suffer from fungal diseases such as leaf blight, basal rot, and foot and root rot, or from a serious viral or mosaic infection. The latter is cureless but may be prevented by destroying affected plants and using healthy bulbs (Brenzel, pp. 354-55). Today, the lily is a popular cut flower worldwide (Jefferson-Brown and Howland, p. 8).

There is ample evidence that lilies are among the oldest cultivated plants, and the Madonna lily, *L. candidum*, is one of the oldest domesticated flowers (McGeorge, pp. 8, 11; Bryan, p. 185; Simpson and Weiner, p. 953; Hoiberg and Pappas, VII, p. 357). Excavation and discoveries have shown that lilies were depicted or painted on vases, murals, monuments, and tombs in ancient times (McGeorge, pp. 8, 11; Hoiberg and Pappas, VII, p. 357). There is a myth that the lily sprang from Eve's tears of repentance when she was expelled from the Garden of Eden. The Madonna lily has been also associated with the Christian church and the Virgin Mary, as a symbol of purity and whiteness (Hoiberg and Pappas, VII, p. 357; Simpson and Weiner, pp. 953-54; McGeorge, pp. 11, 12).

For centuries, Persian poets have likened the lily's petal to the human tongue (Grami, pp. 203-7). They have used the terms ten- and hundred-tongued lily as a metaphor for those who are eloquent as well as those who have tongues but keep secrets, such as the following (collected in Grami, pp. 199-207):

Dah-zabān hamčo susani likan,

bar-e to rāzhā bovand iman.

You're ten-tongued like the lily,

but secrets are safe with you.

(Kamāl-al-Din Esmā'il, d. 635/1237)

Šokr-e Izad hami konad susan;

ān yakigu-ye dah-zabān negarid.

The lily keeps praising God;

notice the one with ten tongues praising One.

(Obayd Zākāni, d. 771/1370)



*Besān-e susan agar dah-zabān šavad Ḥāfeż,
čo ġonča piš-e to-aš mohr bar dahān bāšad.*
Even if Ḥāfeż had ten tongues like the lily,
his lips would still be sealed, like a rosebud, with you.
(Ḥāfeż, d. 792/1390)

*Ḳāmuš šod az kajlat-e goftār-e to Šā'eb,
susan ke sarāpāy zabān ast dar in bāġ.*
Šā'eb! Even the lily, which is all tongue in this garden,
became speechless with embarrassment when she heard your poems.
(Šā'eb Tabrizi, d. 1081/1470).

The lily's sharp, pointed petals have been likened to a sword and a dagger in Persian poetry:

*Zabān-e ābdār-e susan-e tar,
nemāyad az kaji šamšir o kanjar.*
The lustrous tongue of the fresh lily,
looks curved like a sword and dagger.
(Helāli Jaġatā'i, d. 936/1529)

*Kešam kanjar čo susan bar tan-e k'iš;
čo gol dar kun kešam pirāhan-e k'iš.*
I will stab myself with a dagger like a lily;
I will soak my shirt in blood like a red rose.
(Jāmi, d. 898/1492).

Lily and garlic are both white, but the garlic's odor differs from the lily's fragrance (Grami, p. 200). The Persian phrase *susan o sir* indicates a sharp contrast between these two things:

*Agar susan hami k'āhi nešāndan,
naġost az jā-ye susan sir barkan!*
Before you plant a lily,
first uproot the garlic from its site
(Nāšer-e Ḳosrow; d. 481/1088).

Selling garlic for the price of lily is an expression implying cheating, dishonesty:

In jahān rā farib besyār ast;



beforošad ba nerķ-e susan sir.

“This world is very deceptive;
it sells garlic for the price of lily
(Nāšer-e Kōsrow).

Manučehri Dāmḡāni (d. 432/1040) compared the peacock’s toe to the shape of the lily’s petals (*Čang-aš čo barg-e susan o pāy-aš čo barg-e ney*) and the parrot’s tail to a bundle of petals (*Dom-e har tuṭiak-i čun waraq-e susan-e tar*; Grami, p. 201).

Many Persian poets have referred to the body of the beloved as *susan-bar* (*bar* here meaning “bosom”), which has been recorded as one simple word, *susanbar*. This has led to the term being defined in various Persian dictionaries as a plant’s name and used interchangeably with *sisanbar*, a plant of the mint family; but *susanbar* has not been used as a botanical name in Persian poetry (Grami, pp. 201, 480).

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