







FLOWERS AND PLANTS OF THE BIBLE







God created plants on the third day (Ge 1:11–13), and when God created man, he placed him in a garden to work it and take care of it (Ge 2:15). One of the final moments of our Lord’s life was spent in a garden—praying and seeking his Father’s will (Mt 26:36). The Bible says that Jesus often brought his disciples there. Every year the spring rains turn the parched and dry hillsides of the Holy Land into a vivid blaze of wildflowers and bulbous plants. Although ancient writers as well as Biblical scholars debate some references to flora as to specifically which species is referenced, the following chart can help you visualize how the plants mentioned in the Bible may have looked.

See also Ge 1:29,31; 2:5,8; Lk 22:39–40; Jn 18:1–2; chart on Flowers and Plants (SS 8)






Flowers of the Bible

FLOWERS	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p>ANEMONE</p>	<p>Mt 6:28–29 Lk 12:27–28</p> <p><i>“Flowers of the field” / “Wildflowers”</i></p>	<p>The single-flowered poppy anemone or windflower covers the hillsides of the Holy Land with dazzling color each spring.</p>
 <p>CROCUS</p>	<p>SS 4:14</p> <p><i>“Saffron”</i></p>	<p>Four thousand stigmas and upper portions of the style of the saffron crocus are needed to make an ounce of saffron, a valuable dye in biblical times and even in the modern era.</p>
 <p>CYCLAMEN</p>	<p>Mt 6:28–30 Lk 12:27–28</p> <p><i>“Flowers of the field” / “Wildflowers”</i></p>	<p>Also called Solomon’s crown. It is often given at Christmastime because of its glorious blooms (pinks and reds) and deep biblical roots.</p>
 <p>HYACINTH</p>	<p>SS 2:1–2,16 SS 6:2–3</p> <p><i>“Lily”</i></p>	<p>Native to eastern Mediterranean where it flowers in the wild with deep blue perfumed spikes.</p>







Flowers of the Bible (cont.)

FLOWERS	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p>IRIS YELLOW FLAG</p>	<p>Hos 14:5 "Lily"</p>	<p>In the Holy Land it grows in masses along streams and waterways.</p>
 <p>SCARLET TURK'S CAP LILY</p>	<p>SS 5:13 "Lilies"</p>	<p>Probably refers to the scarlet lily, since the passage refers to the lips. Grows wild in the woods in Palestine.</p>
 <p>MADONNA LILY</p>	<p>SS 6:2 "Lilies"</p>	<p>Grows wild in upper Galilee. Used in religious paintings to symbolize chastity, purity and eternal beauty.</p>
 <p>NARCISSUS</p>	<p>Isa 35:1 "Crocus"</p>	<p>Sweet smelling, it grows commonly in the Holy Land. Some scholars believe it to be Isaiah's "crocus."</p>
 <p>STAR OF BETHLEHEM</p>	<p>2Ki 6:25 "Seed pods"</p>	<p>This bulbous and delicate plant dots fields and hillsides with prolific white blossoms.</p>
 <p>TULIP</p>	<p>SS 2:1 "Rose"</p>	<p>The "rose of Sharon" is believed to be the mountain tulip. The deep red flowers grow wild in the sandy plains of Sharon.</p>

Vegetables of the Bible

VEGETABLES	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p>CUCUMBER</p>	<p>Nu 11:4–6 Isa 1:8</p> <p><i>“Cucumbers”</i></p>	<p>Grown along the Nile, a major food of the poor centuries before Christ. A “cooling fruit” enjoyed in Egypt during the summer heat.</p>
 <p>MELON MUSKMELON WATERMELON</p>	<p>Nu 11:5</p> <p><i>“Melons”</i></p>	<p>Commentators believe the word “melons” refers to both the muskmelon and watermelon since both grew in Egypt prior to Israel’s deliverance. Served as an alternative to water, largely consumed by the poor.</p>
 <p>LEEK</p>	<p>Nu 11:5</p> <p><i>“Leeks”</i></p>	<p>The leek’s delicate flavor replaced the stronger tasting onion in cooking. Regarded as a “sacred plant” for its multi-medicinal value.</p>
 <p>ONION</p>	<p>Nu 11:5</p> <p><i>“Onions”</i></p>	<p>The “Egyptian onion” was sweet and mild. It was highly esteemed and worshiped by the Egyptians; it flourished more than any other plant in tomb paintings.</p>
 <p>GARLIC</p>	<p>Nu 11:5</p> <p><i>“Garlic”</i></p>	<p>This strongly scented vegetable, along with leeks and onions, was part of the diet of the slaves who built the pyramids. The juice was used to control many diseases.</p>

Bitter Herbs of the Bible

BITTER HERBS*	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p data-bbox="195 492 285 513">CHICORY</p>	<p data-bbox="506 398 565 419">Nu 9:11</p> <p data-bbox="473 437 598 458"><i>“Bitter herbs”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 398 1059 460">Called “liver’s friend” by the Egyptians and consumed in large amounts. It was thought to purify the blood and liver.</p>
 <p data-bbox="189 689 306 710">DANDELION</p>	<p data-bbox="506 583 565 605">Ex 12:8</p> <p data-bbox="506 606 565 627">Nu 9:11</p> <p data-bbox="473 645 598 666"><i>“Bitter herbs”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 606 1053 645">Leaves were used as a vegetable and the root for making medicine.</p>
 <p data-bbox="201 883 277 904">ENDIVE</p>	<p data-bbox="506 751 565 772">Ex 12:8</p> <p data-bbox="506 774 565 795">Nu 9:11</p> <p data-bbox="473 804 598 825"><i>“Bitter herbs”</i></p> <p data-bbox="506 843 565 864">Ge 2:5</p> <p data-bbox="500 873 571 894"><i>“Plant”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 804 1018 843">Bitter tasting, a tall leafy plant related to chicory. Used as salad greens.</p>
 <p data-bbox="195 1077 283 1098">LETTUCE</p>	<p data-bbox="506 980 565 1001">Ex 12:8</p> <p data-bbox="506 1003 565 1024">Nu 9:11</p> <p data-bbox="473 1042 598 1063"><i>“Bitter herbs”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 998 1018 1037">A weedy, bitter-tasting plant with yellow flower heads.</p>
 <p data-bbox="201 1280 277 1301">SORREL</p>	<p data-bbox="506 1192 565 1213">Nu 9:11</p> <p data-bbox="473 1222 598 1243"><i>“Bitter herbs”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 1187 1071 1248">Known to Israelites as sheep’s sorrel. Its sharp, bitter taste combined well with other greens to improve their flavor.</p>
 <p data-bbox="171 1474 301 1495">WATERCRESS</p>	<p data-bbox="506 1386 565 1407">Dt 32:2</p> <p data-bbox="473 1416 598 1437"><i>“New grass”</i></p>	<p data-bbox="692 1390 1041 1434">Known for its pungent flavor and medicinal qualities. High in vitamins and iron.</p>

**“Bitter herbs” are bitter-tasting plants that grew in ancient Egypt and were eaten by Moses and the Israelites during Passover. Many botanical scholars feel these six plants are among the bitter herbs referenced in Scripture. Sometimes the text uses general terms for classification instead of specific species. Today these herbs are more commonly known as vegetables.*

Herbs of the Bible

Herbs were cultivated by the ancients for practical purposes ranging from the making of essential oils and culinary uses to the healing purposes of medicine (Ge 1:29). The latter was the most important.






See also Ge 1:11–12,31; 2:5,8–15; 3:23; 1Ki 21:1–16; SS 4:12–16; 6:11

*Usage Key:






A—Annual
TP—Tender Perennial

HP—Hardy Perennial
CUL—Culinary

MD—Medicinal
O—Ornamental

BITTER HERBS	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	USAGE*	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p>ALOE</p>	<p>Jn 19:39 Ps 45:8 “Aloes”</p> <p>Mk 14:4–5 “Perfume”</p>	<p>TP MD</p>	<p>Sap from the leaves is added to other spices to make anointing oil (Mt 26:7). Used in religious rites and for purifying bodies of the dead.</p>
 <p>CORIANDER</p>	<p>Ex 16:31 Nu 11:7 “Coriander seed”</p>	<p>A CUL MD</p>	<p>One of the most ancient herbs. Valued for both its seasoning and medicinal properties.</p>
 <p>CUMIN TITHING HERB</p>	<p>Isa 28:25–27 Mt 23:23 “Cumin”</p>	<p>A CUL</p>	<p>Native to the Mediterranean region since the days of Isaiah. Used in unleavened bread and for digestive disorders.</p>
 <p>DILL TITHING HERB</p>	<p>Mt 23:23 “Dill”</p>	<p>A MD CUL</p>	<p>Used by the ancients for flavoring and in medicine.</p>
 <p>FENNEL</p>	<p>Isa 28:25–27 “Caraway”</p>	<p>A CUL</p>	<p>The aromatic hot-tasting seeds were an Eastern substitute for black pepper. The spicy oil from the seeds increased the appetite and saliva flow.</p>

Herbs of the Bible (cont.)

BITTER HERBS	REFERENCE/ BIBLICAL TERM	USAGE*	DESCRIPTION/USE
 <p>FRANKINCENSE INCENSE</p>	<p>Ex 30:34 Mt 2:11 “Frankincense”</p> <p>Lev 24:7 SS 3:6 “Incense”</p>		<p>A ceremonial plant valued for the gum resin it produced. It symbolized holiness.</p>
 <p>HYSSOP</p>	<p>Ex 12:21–22 Nu 19:6,18 1Ki 4:33 Ps 51:7 “Hyssop”</p>	<p>TP CUL</p>	<p>Believed to be Syrian marjoram. This bushy herb was used by the Egyptians to cleanse the temples. Known as the holy herb because of its use in rituals as a symbol of purification.</p>
 <p>MARJORAM</p>	<p>see <i>Hyssop</i></p>		<p>Known to Israelites as sheep’s sorrel. Its sharp, bitter taste combined well with other greens to improve their flavor.</p>
 <p>MINT TITHING HERB</p>	<p>Mt 23:23 Lk 11:42 “Mint”</p>	<p>HP CUL MD</p>	<p>Probably horsemint. Used for cooking, medicine, and worship. Often strewn in synagogues to reduce bad odors.</p>
 <p>MYRRH INCENSE</p>	<p>Ps 45:8 SS 3:6; 4:14 Mt 2:11 “Myrrh”</p>		<p>A gum resin highly valued as a perfume and as an incense. Used as a symbol of Christ’s future suffering.</p>



PLACES OF SHELTER AND DELIGHT

The garden (Heb. *gan* or Gk. *kepos*, lit. “a covered or hidden place”) has been an important part of Near Eastern culture as well as a delightful place of repose throughout the generations. In Biblical literature, frequent references appear to the garden, picturing an enclosed or walled plot with vegetation and water, shade and quiet, beauty and utility. Enough drawings are extant of ancient gardens to confirm these general features: planning for aesthetic effect and convenience of using water supplies (Ge 13:10; Jer 31:12); beauty and fragrance of flowers and fruits (Ge 2:9); shelter and shade (SS 6:11; Lk 13:19); pleasure, such as the meeting place for friends (Jn 18:1–2) or site for social events (Est 1:5); provision of food (Jer 29:5,28; Am 9:14); protection (SS 4:12); retreat for quiet meditation (Est 7:7; Mt 26:36–46).

The garden took time and effort to prepare, yet it offered rewards in return. In Genesis 2, the Lord chose to use the garden for a metaphor to describe the first home he established for Adam and Eve. That home was to be a place of shelter and delight (Ge 2:8, note).

Biblical gardens include: the Garden of Eden or Garden of the Lord (Ge 2; 3; Eze 28:13; 31:8–9; 36:35); the Shulammitte’s figurative garden (SS 4:12–16); Solomon’s gardens (Ecc 2:5–6); the king’s garden in Jerusalem (2Ki 25:4; Ne 3:15; Jer 39:4; 52:7); the garden in the palace of Xerxes (Est 1:5; 7:7–8); Gethsemane (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Jn 18:2)