

## HYACINTH

Botanical Name: *Hyacinthus*

Family: *Liliaceae*

According to Greek mythology, Hyacinth was a very handsome boy who the god Apollo loved. One day they were playing the ancient game of quoits that uses a discus. When Hyacinth ran forward to catch the discus, it struck him on the head and killed him. There is more to this story, of course, in that Zephyr, the wind, was jealous of the friendship and actually blew the quoit against a rock to rebound and kill the boy. Apollo cradled

Hyacinth who was dying in his arms, and before death a flower sprang from his bleeding head. Though Apollo begged Hyacinth to live, the blow was fatal. Wild hyacinths always bend toward the ground and the letter-like markings on their petals were supposed to read *AI, AI* in Greek, the sound of a mournful wail. Wild gladioli and some wild orchids in Greece have the same symbol. All of the three are used in wreaths for the dead.



Not only was Apollo responsible for Hyacinth's death but also for Daphne who turned into a laurel bush and Cypris who was transformed into a cypress tree. So Apollo left a tree, a bush and a flower—almost a complete garden of metamorphosed passion. Hyacinths were brought to Europe from Turkey and were first grown in gardens in Padua. Perhaps the German physician, Leonhardt Rauwolf, brought the plant with him from his Turkish travels in 1573. Rauwolf wrote an account of his travels that was translated into English by botanist John Ray. He is the first Westerner to describe coffee, which, he noted, made him feel “curiously animated.”

Originally the hyacinth came in only four colors. It became more and more popular in European gardens and by 1725 there were two thousand cultivars, including double



hyacinths, which are rare in gardens today. Because of their distinctive scent and formal bearing, many do not like this plant. Others delight in them even forcing them to bloom in early winter.

*100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names*

By Diana Wells