

Enchanted by Flowers:

Emily Dickinson and Her Life as a Botanist

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VIVIAN SONG/THE EPOCH TIMES

While most Americans know Emily Dickinson as a marvelous poet, few know her as a great gardener. In fact, more than one-third of Dickinson's poems allude to flowers.

"Emily Dickinson's Garden: The Poetry of Flowers," an exhibition that combines over 50 fascinating artifacts related to Dickinson's life aims to invite people to know her poems and her life as an excellent botanist. The exhibition is held at the New York Botanical Garden's Mertz Library, in the Bronx.

Dickinson inherited endless passion for plants from her family. Her mother, also named Emily, was once famous for planting figs. Austin, her brother, whom she shared a connection with throughout her life, was fond of trees. In a letter to him, Dickinson wrote, "Here is a little forest whose leaf is evergreen. Here is a brighter garden, where not a frost has been in its unfading flowers. I heat the bright bee bum. Prithree, my brother into my garden come!"

Vinnie, her younger sister, often assisted the poet in gardening in her later years. When they were young, the sisters obtained seeds from a company called Bliss in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Emily Dickinson spent seven years at her paternal grandfather's Amherst Academy, today known as Amherst College. Edward Hitchcock, a devoted and inspirational teacher from the school, worked on reconciling science and religion through the study of geology. He was among the first people who influenced and introduced Dickinson to the profound world of botany. "I study history and botany. My plants grow beautifully," wrote Dickinson

in a letter to Jane Humphrey, a good friend from the school.

During the early years in school, Dickinson was never too shy to socialize. However after she entered her 30s, it is believed that the poet spent most of her time alone in the family's house where she personally nurtured a garden. Short visits to her brother Austin's house were frequent. However she would always go home in time to look after the plants. "I have got to go out in the garden now, and whip a Crown-Imperial for presuming to hold its head up," said the poet to her sister-in-law Susan in a farewell.

Traits of nature were used by the poet to express love, thanks, and apologies. As an excellent naturalist and gardener, Dickinson always picked flowers from her garden, such as daylilies, and gave them away together with cards and letters. The garden was always treated like part of the family.

Roses were a favorite among all the flowers in Emily's garden. She often found similarities between the flower and herself: "A flask of Drew. A bee or two. A breeze a caper in the trees and I'm a rose."

The Indian pipes, known for their ghostly white color, gave Dickinson insights into life and death. Many of her poems were dedicated to the theme of immortality, after the loss of a beloved cousin. It is believed that in the later years of her life, she only wore white. One of her white dresses that a relative donated to Amherst College is now at the exhibition at the botanical garden.

Nearly all plants related to the poet's life can be found in different parts of the botanical garden. The exhibition, which will run until Aug. 1, has attracted more than 13,000 visitors, said a representative.



ANGELA WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES



SUNNY BLOOMS: Arlow Stout, a type of daylilies, were Dickinson's favorite. ANGELA WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES



ARTIFACT: A white dress worn by Dickinson displayed at the exhibition. TALISMAN BROLIN



CHEERFUL: Dewberry Candy daylilies at the New York Botanical Garden. ANGELA WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES



VISIT: Mertz Library, New York Botanical Garden, Bronx. ANGELA WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES

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