

The Garden by Moonlight

By Kim Smith

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
—John Keats (1795–1821)

The idea of creating a fragrant garden is deeply rooted in ancient history. One of the earliest aromatic gardens was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, built in the 6th century b.c. by King Nebuchadnezzar for his wife Amytes, daughter of the King of the Medes. Described by the Greeks, stone columns supported these resplendent gardens with irrigated terraces. The most potently fragrant plants were grown here, and Queen Amytes favored the terraces for her walks, which bloomed with lilies and roses.

The countries of the Middle East abound with an array of scented trees and plants. From historical records dating back to 2500 b.c. we know that the enclosed courtyards of the Persian palaces were planted with jasmine, fruit trees (especially oranges), hyacinth, myrtle, and jonquils. But above all other flowering plants, the rose was held in the highest esteem. The Damask rose grew in nearly every garden in Syria. The country takes its name from the word Suri (a delicate rose), hence Suristan (the land of roses).

With a few notable exceptions, the most intensely fragrant roses are usually in shades of rose-pink to white. Pure white flowers release the strongest perfume, followed by creamy white, pale pink, pale yellow, yellow, purple-pink and purple. Plants with blue, orange, and red flowers have a high degree of pigmentation and usually generate little or no scent. The greater the amount of essential oil produced, the lesser degree of pigmentation in a flower. The oil is the result of the transformation of chlorophyll into tannoid compounds (or pigments), which is in inverse ratio to the amount of pigment in a flower. Scent is the oxidation of essential oils of flowers and leaves. The most intensely scented flowers, lily of-the-valley, orange blossoms, gardenia, *Stephanotis floribunda*, and tuberose, for example, have thick, velvet-like petals that retain their fragrance by preventing the essential oils from evaporating. Particularly for a small garden, or when designing a garden room within a larger garden, a moon garden and fragrant garden become one in the same.

A fragrant moon garden room would, ideally, be sited in an out of the way niche, yet still within close proximity to the kitchen, and where it can also be viewed from the patio or porch. Imagine an intimate corner of the garden arranged with a dining table and comfortable chairs, embowered with fragrant vines and encircled with white and pale-hued flowers and silvery foliage. Alternatively, a well-traversed pathway leading to and from the home makes an ideal fragrant moonlit garden—the white flowers caught in the moonlight illuminate the way, and you might happen to brush against the flowers and foliage, further enhancing the moon garden experience. Our moonlit gardens are made more intimate when planted with an abundance of fragrant blooms and foliage. The air impregnated with the scents of flowers and foliage imbues a

memorable atmosphere, playing a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, role of strengthening the ambiance we wish to create.

To extend the season as long as possible, plant fragrant flowers that bloom from early spring through autumn, with the greatest concentration in growing flowers that bloom during the summer months, as that is generally (dictated by the vagaries of New England weather) when we are most often enjoying the garden in the evening. The following list is by no means comprehensive. There are myriad plants from which to select—these are some of my tried and true favorites. The upper case abbreviations following each plant E, M, and L denote when they bloom—early-, mid- or late-season and the lower case *f* indicates the level of fragrance—four *f*'s having the highest degree of scent.

Flowers of the Night

Small Trees, Shrubs and Vines

- Apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*) ~ E, *fff*
- White lilac (*Syringa vulgaris* alba, *Syringa* 'Beauty of Moscow') ~ E, *ffff*
- Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) ~ E
- Fragrant snowball viburnum (*Viburnum carlcephalum*) ~ E, *ffff*
- Tree peony 'Joseph Rocks' (*Paeonia rockii*) ~ E, *ffff*
- Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) ~ E
- Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis* alba) ~ E-M, *ffff*
- Oyama magnolia (*Magnolia sieboldii*) ~ E-M, *ffff*
- Mock orange (*Philadelphus* x 'Innocence') ~ E-M, *ffff*
- Night blooming daylily (*Hemerocallis citrina*) ~ M, *ffff*
- Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica* 'Halliana') ~ M, *ffff*
- Purple-leaf honeysuckle (*L. japonica* var. *purpurea*) ~ M, *ffff*
- Honeysuckle 'Graham Thomas' (*L. periclymenum* 'Graham Thomas') ~ M, *ff*
- Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) ~ M, *fff*
- Meadowsweet (*Spiraea alba*) ~ M, *f*
- New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*) ~ M, *ff*
- Annabelle hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) ~ M-L, *f*
- Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) ~ M-L, *ff*
- 'White Profusion' butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) ~ M-L, *fff*
- Roses 'Madame Alfred Carrière,' 'Darlow's Enigma' (*Rosa*) ~ E-M-L, *fff*
- 'Moonlight of the Groves' (*Jasmine sambuc*) ~ E-M-L, *ffff*
- 'Shooting Star' gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*) ~ E-M-L, ~ *ffff*

Annuals, Perennials and Bulbs

- Bleeding hearts (*Dicentra spectabilis* 'Alba') ~ E
- 'Snow Queen' iris (*Iris sibirica*) ~ E
- White petunias (*Petunia hybrida*) ~ E-M-L, *f*
- White gaura (*Gaura lindheimeri*) ~ E-M-L
- Feverfew (*Chrysanthemum parthenium*) ~ E-M-L, *fff*
- Ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) ~ M, *f*
- Penstemon 'Husker Red' (*Penstemon digitalis*) ~ M
- Regal lily (*Lilium regale*) ~ M, *fff*
- Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum* x *superbum*) ~ M
- Chinese bellflower (*Platycodon grandiflorus* 'Fuji White') ~ M

Oriental lily 'Casa Blanca' (*Lilium*) ~ M, ffff
Phlox 'David' (*Phlox paniculata davidii*) ~ M, fff
Four o'clocks (*Mirabilis jalapa*) ~ M-L, fff
Peacock orchid (*Acidanthera murielae*) ~ M-L, ffff
Tuberose (*Polianthes tuberosa*) ~ M-L, ffff
Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) ~ M-L
Boltonia (*Boltonia asteroides*) ~ L
August lily (*Hosta plantaginea*) ~ L, ffff
Moonflowers (*Ipomoea alba*) ~ L, ffff
Montauk daisy (*Chrysanthemum nipponicum*) ~ L, fff
Japanese anemone 'Honorine Jobert' (*Anemone japonica*) ~ L
Korean daisy (*Chrysanthemum* 'Single Apricot Korean') ~ L, f

Groundcovers

Lily of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*) ~ E, ffff
Sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*) ~ E-M, fff

Moths will find your moon garden of fragrance particularly enticing. Our 'White Profusion' butterfly bush takes a bit longer to come into florescence, but once in bloom, day and night the starry white panicles are covered with nectaring Lepidoptera. The photo is of, what I believe to be, a female Poplar Sphinx Moth, found in the garden just this past week by our daughter.

Kim Smith is an interior and garden designer residing in Gloucester with her husband and two children. Preorders for her forthcoming book, *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! ~ Notes from a Gloucester Garden*, are available through her website at www.kimsmithdesigns.com and Toad Hall Bookstore at www.toadhallbooks.org. Kim will be happy to respond to readers' questions and comments at kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com

Female Poplar Sphinx Moth

