

The Intimate Beauty of Flowers



G. Edwin Varner

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook publication helps you appreciate the beautiful fine details of our garden flowers. We always look at a flower but not notice its intricate designs, markings, and subtle colors. Don't quickly glance at a flower but take the time to observe its more exquisite detail.

I base most of the following material on my favorite garden flower photos. It would be best if you considered this publication as a quasi-photo-journal.

The limited descriptive information is guidance for what you should observe in each photo. Unlike most of my other ebooks, growing information is not included.

I list the following plants by their Latin and common names.

The digital photos are from my home, public gardens, and many nurseries within my area.

Introduction

If you want to know a summary of this ebook, a quote in a *Sherlock Holmes* short story can summarize it. In “*A Scandal in Bohemia*” by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock gives his companion, Dr. Watson, constructive criticism when viewing the scene of a crime. “*You see, but you do not observe.*” Doyle based his *Sherlock Holmes* stories on the power of observation.

How does this quote apply when enjoying garden flowers? It’s elementary, my dear reader, don’t give them a passing glance but look at them — intimately. The real beauty of any flower is when viewed individually and up-close. So close, you can see every part, color, and marking of that flower.

Intimacy, in many cultures, refers to sexuality. It also applies here in your flower garden. Sex in the garden? Whoa! Now that would make any ebook a potential bestseller. But not for this one. Sorry, but the only sex involved here applies to flowers. Please remember, a flower is a sexual organ in advanced plants. It has fascinating structures with the goal of forming seeds of the next generation.

This ebook is not your basic high school biology textbook on how all these reproductive parts work. It is a primer to instruct you to focus your observation on the delicate and beautiful constructional details of a flower.

We can also define intimacy as having a close and personal relationship, not only with another person but also with a thing. Here, it is with you and an individual flower.

I have narrowed down five important observational studies for you to view a flower. They comprise its exterior and interior views, wildly colorful petals, gaudy double flowers, and markings to help guide pollinators. Each section will become more self-explanatory when viewing my photos of flowers. I sorted through hundreds to highlight the qualities many flowers share.

This publication differs from my other ebooks on flowers, for it is less about facts but more about my tour-guide viewpoints about those photos. They are digital representatives on what to look at (no, let's get it right — observe) on other flowers. Before you know it, you'll be watching not the bed but an individual flower, right down to its intimate parts of sexuality. If hummingbirds and bees can do it, so can you.

Let's get started observing every detail of a flower or plant.

To find the plants listed in this ebook, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Exterior Wonders

First impressions are always important, not only when first meeting a person but also when introduced to a new plant. Does the flower have a pleasant color or scent? Why does it have those unusual markings?

What we should concentrate on is the distinguishing features of the entire plant. We can get up close and personal to view every nuance of each petal and leaf.

The following plants have beautiful external qualities that we rarely view and appreciate. It may be of their flowers, leaves, bark, or other structures that have distinctive colors, patterns, or outward appearances that will amaze us — only when we concentrate on looking at them.

Some plants become highlighted by natural enhancements, such as by the setting sun, dewdrops, or exaggerated structures. Others use genetics and are selected by us for their unusual color arrangements or patterns.

No matter how they appear, the following plants amazed me when I encountered them. The next time you see a flower, don't glance at it — stop and admire it!

Coleus Leaves



Before we look at the photos of flowers, let's inspect a colorful plant's leaves. Native to Southeast Asia, **Coleus** has always been popular as colorful foliage annual plants for gardens, containers, and houseplants. Newer varieties are pleasantly gaudy with eye-popping beautiful colors.

You can't resist growing a few when you see them in nurseries and garden centers. For my eyes, they resemble gorgeous stained-glass windows with vivid colors and unusual geometric patterns.

Other people may see the leaf veins as color-altered aerial photos of rivers and valleys. What do you see?



Many growers raise most Coleus plants from seed and will have many leaf colors. No two plants (or leaves) will look alike. The most beautiful and expensive plants are cutting grown to keep their color complexities and leaf shapes.

If you can afford it, purchase several for containers but not for flower beds. When grown in containers, you can get up-close to enjoy those spectacular colors. They are worth growing and admiring!

Dandelion Seed Head



These world-wide weeds have tiny flowers collected together into a composite flower head. An elegant, silky white material called pappus attaches to each seed. This light-weight material releases from the seed-head by the wind or a big puff of air expelled by a child's (or us child-like adults) lungs. Looking and acting like a parachute, the seed can travel a few yards away or to a yard in another city.

Well, we all know this, don't we? But, have you gazed into one of those fluffy seed heads and admired the way all the crystalline strands attach to the dark brown seeds? The above photo reminds me of a Waterford Crystal Times Square New Year's Eve Ball in New York City.

You can see geometric patterns that represent the old rule of form-follows-function. Many builders and architects' study and mimic

natural designs in their construction of buildings and products. Why try to struggle to invent or design something when Mother Nature has already done it for you to copy? All it takes is to open your eyes to natural objects — like this dandelion seed head.

Dewdrops on a Rose



I awoke one foggy morning and later toured the garden. While every flower and leaf were sparkling with water drops, this “Ink Spots” rose made me pause — then rush indoors to get my camera.

Its dark blackish-red petals were glistening with pristine dewdrops. I had to take several shots, for I could not determine which angle was better to display the fog droplets. Each water drop was placed perfectly on each petal.

Try to get into the habit of viewing a flower cleansed after a summer shower or when glistened by a light frost, with feathery ice crystals extending outward from the petals. Nature can add extra “bling” to an already beautiful thing.

Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart



Dicentra spectabilis or *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*

Some flowers have an uncanny resemblance to something else. It's like viewing clouds and seeing a familiar object. The common name of this wildflower perfectly describes it.

The heart-shaped “puffy” blossoms are usually pink, rose-red, or pure white. The pink and red ones are the most stunning, for they resemble a broken heart with the bottom showing a drop of white blood (think of it as blood plasma). Don't worry — a few varieties show crimson red drops giving these flowers a jolt of *CSI* realism.

In some ways, it looks semi-ghastly but is a well-constructed, charming, little flower!

Prickly Pear Cactus



Prickly Pear cactus, *Opuntia humifusa*, has large 'pads' covered in sharp spines or needles. For this photo, I love the interplay of sunlight and shadow on the pads and especially on the needles. It looks as if you were to touch your screen you will get a nasty prick on your fingers. You may look, but don't you dare touch!

The pads are the stems of a cactus while the needles are modified leaves.

The interplay of light and shadow also creates a 3-D effect to showcase the beautiful colors. How many shades of green, yellow, and brown can you see?

Late in the spring or early summer, an incredible transformation happens when this cactus blooms with bright yellow flowers. If only I

had the chance to see and photograph that extravaganza of beauty!

Spruce Tree Cones



You may think these are Christmas ornaments on this Spruce tree, but you're mistaken. It's springtime, and these are the developing seed cones. Their shape and color add a beautiful contrast to the silver and green needles. Later in the year, these cones will turn brown and brittle holding within each leaf "scale" a seed.

There is so much variety of colors and textures from these cones and boughs. You can almost absorb the crisp, springtime freshness and smell the "pine-ness" emanating from this photo. I have to admit; this is one of my favorite images.

Sunflower Radiance



Helianthus (or sunflowers) have had a long history with Man. Initially, they were only grown for the protein-rich seeds as food but also compressed for cooking oil. The flowers were later grown for their beauty in the garden.

The common bright yellow varieties now share our gardens with unusual colorful types with reds, oranges, and many bi-colors such as a variety shown above. They all share one quality — the ability to mimic the brilliance of the sun but to a much lesser extent.

Mature sunflowers point their heads toward the sun during the day. It's not completely understood why this happens, but it helps to establish why the sunflower is called a "flower of the sun." I cannot think of any other flowering plant exhibiting this unique "behavior."

Interior Wonders

We admire the exterior petal view of all flowers, but how many times have we looked into them? The contrasting colors and geometric patterns will never disappoint you of their stunning beauty. Some flowers have different, if not surprising, pollen colors that stand out from the petals.

Many blossoms have vivid vein colors that may act as nectar guides — explained later — but also add brightened contrast of the petal color.

Then, there are flowers having subtle shades of blended colors. No matter what color or patterns, the interior of flowers can be more beautiful than the outside.

The next time you view a blossom, peek inside the petals and stare into the floral cup. Let your eyes drink in the pleasant gaudiness of the decorative parts that usually go unnoticed. You will never view another flower again without searching for all its beautiful details.

Never underestimate the beauty of a flower's interior structures!

Abutilon “Red Tiger”



Commonly called **Flowering Maple**, *Abutilon* is light-years from being a Maple tree (*Acer*), but has a passing resemblance to its leaves. It can grow as a tropical tree but, for most gardeners, it can grow as a tall potted plant. Okay, now that we recognize this disclaimer, let’s admire the blossoms of this fantastic variety.

Abutilon has dangling Mallow-like blossoms shaped, as many references describe, like Japanese lanterns. In this outstanding and stunning variety, the flowers have a yellow base-color extensively etched with electrifying bright red veins.

Some growers call it “**Tiger Eye**” *Abutilon*, but most call it “**Red Tiger**.” For me, I would rename it as “Tiger Stripe” *Abutilon*. Well, let’s state the

obvious — the red veins resemble tiger stripes. No matter, it's all part of the confusing name-game.

Now, let's get mauled by the beauty of this unusual flower. The outer petals appear eye-catching, but if you look upward into the blossom (like the above photo), the yellow and red colors are brighter and more vivid. Here, you can also view the convoluted mass of stamens and pistils.

African Daisy



Here is a prime example of where a familiar name creates confusion in its proper Latin identification. There appear to be many types (or species) of African Daisies. For our immediate purpose, let's concentrate our attention on enjoying their floral beauty, no matter the species name. For starters, let's begin with:

Gazania rigens hybrids

If you were to name a flower desperate to call attention to itself, this South African annual instantly comes to mind. Its other common nickname is the *Treasure Flower*. My goodness, aren't we special? Treasure? Okay. Well, it is unusual for it flaunts colors so vivid and bright you may see a blossom many miles away. No, not really, but each

daisy-like ray flower petal radiates burning-hot yellows, reds (including fuchsia pink), and vibrant orange along with brilliant white.

To make matters more colorfully bizarre, the petals also provide a roll of contrasting shades, including black. The whole effect is like a large, star-bursting pinwheel. Vibrant colors glow everywhere within this composite flower. The central area is where all the bands of colors unite to highlight the small (and fertile) disk florets.

Gazania plants are easy to grow and bloom for most of the summer. A colorful mix of different varieties will provide you with several weeks of intense scrutiny to appreciate all the colorful blends and patterns. You may need to wear sunglasses while viewing these color-intense flowers!

Am I overreacting to the brilliance of these blossoms? Maybe, but you be the judge, especially when viewing another type of African Daisy shown below.



Another African Daisy (with the Latin generic name of *Osteospermum*) has equally pretty zinnia-like flowers but without all the pinwheel stripes. This species prefers more solid colors, but with one mind-blowing exception — the central disk florets are a startling metallic or electric blue.

For more pizzazz or “bling,” the anthers have gold pollen. You can also notice a few anthers metamorphosing into preemie-petals (my own new word – like it?), and they are also vivid purple-blue.

You can never go wrong by adding African Daisies — no matter what Latin name they go by — to your flower garden. The sight of each composite flower is enchanting.

Clematis Stamens



In deciding what colorful garden vines to grow, many people will always choose the beautiful climbing **Clematis**. They always attract our eyes to their large petals (for those varieties that have them), but we may overlook the fine detail of the stamens.

In the above photo, I focused the camera inward to highlight the cluster of blue stamens. For your eyes, they may not seem too spectacular — possibly because of the two-dimensionality — but when viewed “live” and up-close, they add to the symmetrical grandeur of the flower. For me, they look like the tubular flowers of a variety of Quill Chrysanthemums.

Look at the center, and you will notice the white finger-like extensions of the pistils.

Closeup inside a Hibiscus



We view flowers by looking down on them or directly in front of our eyes. From a different perspective, let's look at them by a side profile. It's like looking at mug-shots of arrested criminals. For these flowers and others, they are all guilty of being beautiful.

Look at the above photo: By viewing this Hibiscus blossom by its side profile, you can see the fascinating construction of the mass of bright yellow stamens surrounding the fused column and five red branches of the pistils and stigmas.

In all the years of growing and "looking" at these flowers, I never took the time to admire the fantastic and gorgeous construction of these plant reproductive organs. I know that sentence seems "weird" or eye-wincing when reading, but you are a professional flower lover and can

understand my fascination with this subject. The old Victorian gardeners would have fainted over my lascivious wording.

Closeup inside a Poppy



Poppies never fail to disappoint in flaunting their colorful petals. Some varieties have contrasting pollen and anther colors. When looking at beds of poppies, we admire the “big picture” of their colorful petals waving in a breeze. Let’s stop and look inside the blossoms to view the fine-details.

Most poppy petals display either four black, yellow, or white broad stripes where attached to the stem. These stripes highlight the central ovary, which resembles equal sliced “pie-like wedges” called carpels.

What is remarkable is the color of the anthers or pollen grains. The above photo shows a variety of **Opium Poppy** (*Papaver somniferum*) with bright white anthers against the vivid rose-red petals (also notice the additional pink splashes) and black stripes. How stunning is that?

If you want an even greater stunner of a poppy look at the photo below:



A white petaled poppy with eye-catching blue pollen? BLUE! I wasn't expecting this fantastic sight when glancing at a few white opium poppies until I peeked into a flower. Imagine my surprise at seeing this.

Now, imagine yourself seeing this colorful sight. Plan on growing more poppies in your garden — as soon as possible.

Closeup of a Stargazer Lily



Come any closer in this photo, and you will get pollen on your nose!

Sometimes I envy bees and butterflies, for they can get really close to a flower. Well, that's what Nature wants them to do. They search for nectar and get dusted with pollen. Hopefully, they go to another blossom and get dusted again. They eventually pollinate the flowers.

In the above photo, there are several items to observe:

First, are those brick-red pollen grain-stuffed stamens. When I had my fragrant flower nursery, I was always (unknowingly) walking around with pollen on my nose. Oh well, the flowers appreciated it and gave my customers plenty to laugh about during their visits! I will always wonder if they thought I was "snorting" some illegal substances?

Second, are the vivid colors of the petals. How many shades of pink can you see? And those dark dots on them? They are nectar guides (more information and examples about them later) to help navigate bees and hummingbirds to where the sugary treat awaits them.

Third, which helps complement the guide dots, is that stunning greenish-yellow, star-shaped, central pattern on the petals.

Finally, near the anthers, is the fused style column and three top-knot stigmas ready to receive pollen from another flower.

Did I miss any other essential items while observing this lily? Maybe you better check and see if I missed anything.

This lily is a beautiful example of what I am trying to explain in this ebook. We see a flower like this, but we always fail to observe all the fine details and subtle nuances of color.

I neglected one crucial feature of this lily — and it is not what we can see — but what our noses can smell. Its fragrance is divine! If you do smell it, be careful about the pollen!

Yellow Bearded Iris



This view is looking down on any **German Bearded Iris** flower. This one is an unnamed yellow variety, but it could be any color. The important feature is the blending of colors — not of energetic, stable wavelengths but the subtle creaminess of shades.

One feature of these Iris is a row of fuzzy “beards” carpeting the inner floor of the petals. My little digital camera (with limited macro focusing sensitivity) could not get a crisp image of these delightful structures. They always appear blurred, but if you plunge your 20/20 vision into an Iris blossom, you will see these crystalline fibers bedecked with an orangish pigment. Imagine what a bee will see!

In the above photo, those squiggly lines are called nectar guides, and you will learn more about them in the next section.

Runway Lights

Many flowers have spots or streaks of contrasting vein colors on their petals. These spots, called nectar guides, act like airport runway lights to guide flying pollinating insects (usually bees) toward the center of the blossom. Here, an award of nectar awaits them after dusting the bee with pollen as they walk inside the flower. When visiting similar blossoms, the bee is the agent for cross-pollination.

Think of these flowers like store neon lights, which attract us to stop-and-shop. The same idea applies to bees making a bee-line into a flower following the nectar guides.

For larger pollinating insects, like butterflies, these guides act as arrows to show the center of the flower. These insects are too large to walk into a blossom but land on the petals and can see these guides.

How many times have you noticed these spots and stripes on flowers? We may notice them, but the flower colors are our main attraction. That's fine for our eyes, but for insects, they see flower colors differently. They see colors we do not see, like ultraviolet, with the nectar guides being brightly highlighted — like neon lights.

The following photos show a variety of common flowers having different nectar guides. The next time you see a flower, look for these guides. Let them be your guide for appreciating the small details of any flower in your garden.

Alstroemeria



This tender perennial is not a true lily, but these exotic-looking blossoms resemble one. Many of you may not recognize these plants, but if you visit your local florist, you will see what the typical flower looks like before growing them in your garden.

They scream with having bright yellow, orange, white, pink, or red petals with contrasting throats splashed with vivid purple-brown streaks or spots.

These flowers are long-lasting for cutting (that's why florists love them) and bloom for several weeks beginning in the early summer.

You can find potted plants for transplanting in larger garden centers.

Digitalis – Foxgloves



If streaks and stripes are not for your liking (or any pollinating insects liking), you can always rely on bright spots to guide you toward the center of a flower. Some spots are large to accommodate an insect with nearsightedness.

Foxgloves are popular, tall-growing, multi-colored biennials for any garden. The flower spikes will showcase several blossoms during late spring to midsummer.

Hellebore – Lenten Rose



This early bloomer is a member of the Buttercup family and not to the Rose family. Lenten is a reference to the Christian season of Lent. It is during this time when this plant blooms — give or take a week or two.

While most Northern Hemisphere garden plants are dormant, this one springs to life even in January and continues to grow and bloom into May.

The flower colors range from white to purple (almost black) with all shades of chartreuse green, pale-yellow, light-lavender, and some reddish-pink added for additional pizzazz.

Virtually all the blossoms have contrasting spots, veins, or streaks. Some varieties, such as the one shown above, have many small spots

that, if referred to as nectar guides, a bee would need a GPS device to arrive at the center of the flower.

Over the past decade, there has been a massive interest in creating new colorful varieties. You can discover many of these new plants in larger garden centers and online nurseries.

Lilium – Asiatic Lily



Being a true lily, Asiatic lilies (*Lilium asiatica*) provides the earliest of the lily species to bloom in your garden. Most varieties flower from early to late summer. Although not fragrant, they make up for this lack with the startling “hot” colors of white, red, yellow, or orange petals to advertise themselves.

Most varieties have varying degrees of spotted nectar guides to draw in the occasional large bee — and hummingbirds! Yes, hummingbirds will follow these spots and make a beeline toward the center of the flower to sip some nectar.

One unusual feature of this species of lily is the petals have nectar tubes that hummingbirds stick their beaks into and slurp-up the sweet liquid secreted at the base of each petal. You can see these pinkish “tubes” at

the base of the stamens in the above photo. The other name of this structure is nectaries. Different species of lilies do not have this accessory.

Petunia



There must be several million (well, it seems like it) varieties of petunias on the market for you to grow in your garden. Most have “solid” colors while others can sport a contrasting color — usually to highlight the center of the flower.

Some stunning varieties, such as the oldie-but-goodie **Daddy Series**, have extensive petal veins that have a contrasting color against a white background.

I am not sure you can classify the veins as nectar guides, but they branch everywhere like a roadmap detailing the streets of a major city. The only way to locate the center of the blossom is its different color.

While we are observing this photo, look at the stigma at the very center. It is shiny with a sticky glue-like substance, waiting for the application

of pollen supplied from a passing bee or butterfly.

Salpiglossis – Painted Tongue



What do you get when you cross a daylily and a petunia with a Fabergé Easter egg and a Tiffany lamp? The answer is something with a massive depreciation of value. But, if you guess this outstanding flower, you are also correct. This out-of-the-ordinary annual garden plant provides masses of petunia-like, flamboyant, outlandish, and exceptional colorful flowers.

Introduced from regions of the southern Chilean Andes mountain range in 1824, this magnificent plant took the gardening world first by disbelief, then surprise, and then with wide-eyed wonder. It still amazes non-gardeners who first encounter its stunning beauty.

Some varieties may be of one color, while others have contrasting colors or overlaid with geometric patterns and nectar guide veins.

Some named types (the best ones) are wickedly gorgeous, appearing like stained glass etched with shining gold.

The above photo is '**Royale Purple Bicolor**' and is an aptly named variety which sports blue-purple blossoms with bright golden-yellow veins. Younger flowers have a shade of wine-red but royal-purple with gold rules the display. The effect is impressive!

Viola – Pansy



Pansies can cheer people up — just in time, since they bloom after the doldrums of winter. Some say that the shape of the flowers and their markings make them appear to have a radiant appearance. Maybe so, but what cheers me up is the color — a “mellow” blue with the contrasting yellow interior and cat whisker-like nectar guide markings. That is why I took this photo. They had the characteristics of an old painting with subtle shades of blue.

With happy faces like these, who can be “blue”?

Abstract Petals

Flower petals come in all colors, shapes, and sizes. Some, though, are “over-the-top” in strangeness and shocking appearance. The petals may display amazing designs which may confuse any pollinating insect. Then again, maybe they help to attract some insects — and gardeners — to stop for a visit.

Some plants exhibiting flamboyant petals are not a natural occurrence but of selective breeding and hybridization by growers. Excessive petal production, unusual construction, and colors of these petals can be detrimental for successful pollination.

The following plants have flowers showing this wild and crazy petal construction and coloration.

Allow your eyes to absorb all the blend of colors, the intricacy of patterns or designs, and subtle or specific highlights. There is more to life than primary colors!

Aristolochia – Dutchman's Pipe Vine or Calico Vine



Depending on the species, the flowers vary from small, yellowish-green to large, deep brown-purple with white or yellowish veins. The color of this species (*Aristolochia elegans*) resembles a slab of meat left out in the hot sun. The blossom also has a noticeable “rotten meat” or carrion-corpse aroma.

Guess what pollinates these flowers? Flies. This vine fools them into thinking they are about to enjoy a rotten meat feast and a great place to lay their eggs. Sorry flies, it will not happen. This vine produces these strange flowers for most of the summer until the coolness of Fall.

There are hundreds of *Aristolochia* species scattered around the world, but they all have a similar flower structure but differ in color and

gaudiness.

Dianthus – Superb Pinks or Fringed Pinks



Members of the Carnation family come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Many are perennials in warmer climates but best treated as annuals in freezing locations. Some, like this species, *Dianthus superbus*, are short lived-perennials for they self-seed prolifically and weaken their chances to live another year.

You need this plant for your garden, especially one devoted to fragrance. The single, wild-looking fringed or feathery flowers cover the plant. Their colors range from pure white to lavender, pink, rosy-red, and many bicolors. Most have a gorgeous contrasting central eye color.

This species is perennial but acts like an annual and is hardy from zones 5 to 9.

Seeds are available at some larger garden centers.

Passiflora – Passionflower or Passion Vine



If you had to vote on what is the world's most unusually constructed flower, this would be number one. Most of these plants are tender, tropical vines, but a few, called **Maypops** (*Passiflora incarnata*), are hardy and can survive winter conditions. As the nickname implies, they bloom in the late spring with four-inch diameter flowers. They appear all summer with beautiful white petals ringed with blue to purple filaments, and they have a lovely perfume.

They use coiled tendrils to grab hold of adjacent shrubs, and other supporting structures, to lift themselves to heights of eight to 12 feet and more.

The name '**Passion Vine**' results not only from the notion that eating its succulent egg-sized fruit gives you romantic tendencies but also to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Many South American people call it by the legendary name of "Flower of The Five Wounds." By historical accounts, sometime around 1609, Spanish missionaries wrote about a beautiful flower growing in the South American rainforests that represented Christ's Passion before and during his crucifixion.

We have to have a vivid imagination of what the flower parts represent. The ten sepals and petals of the flower represent the ten apostles who witnessed the crucifixion of Christ. The corona or a ring of wavy filaments represent the crown of thorns. The five stamens are symbolic of the five wounds, and the three stigmas represent the three-head nails. For an extra dramatic flair, palmate leaves and wavy tendrils represent the hands and whips of His Roman persecutors. Like Jesus, the flowers remain alive (well, in full open bloom) for only a day.

With hundreds of species, hybrids, and varieties available for the home gardener, the size, color, and appearance of the flowers is limitless.

Phalaenopsis Orchid



Advertised as one of the easiest of orchid species to raise (I seem to be an exception to this rule), the *Phalaenopsis* is also one of the most beautiful. Several species of orchids secrete nectar, and their interior markings could be nectar guides. But, for this orchid, these interconnecting markings are haphazard and may lead to nowhere.

For a moth (the usual pollinating insect), this confusing roadmap of contrasting colorful lines would give the unfortunate bug an epileptic fit. That is, if the moth could see these lines at night. More than likely, the orchid releases a sweet perfume to attract the moth. Thank goodness for the moth and its sanity.

For our diurnal eyes, the flowers are gorgeous. Make time to get up close and observe the petals — until your eyes get cross-eyed, and you

feel dizzy.

Papaver – Poppy



Many poppies have simple single blossoms, but some varieties go a few steps further in modifying their petals. They add contrasting colors and display ripped or shredded petals. It would be rare to find this in a natural setting (Mother Nature has more conservative tastes), but breeders love to see (and thus breed) plants having striking differences.

The above photo is “**Drama Queen**,” and all parts of the flower are eye-catching. Not only are the petals glare of vivid scarlet and purple, but they insert black against bluish-white stamens. What can possibly top this stunning poppy? How about adding more petals?

Yes, let’s add more petals. Take a good look at “**Black Swan**” shown below.



It's impressive, but, as critics sometimes declare, "less is more." As an artist neighbor of mine would say, "it's way too cluttered." Yes, this poppy is impressive, but my eyes prefer "**Drama Queen**" for its "complicated colors but simplistic construction." I can be an art critic too.

Which poppy do your observant eyes prefer?

Malva – Zebra Hollyhock



A stunning and popular variety related to our common Hollyhock is '**Zebrina**' or the '**Zebra Hollyhock**' (*Malva sylvestris*). Each two-inch, pale lavender blossom has deep purple floral-throats and veins. This pattern is said to resemble zebra stripes. I tend to disagree unless we think of the zebra as being a ruthless Neo-Gothic gang member. Those thick stripes signify a powerful cult insignia. Lions beware!

The floral spikes can grow to over four feet tall, but produce many side branches. Flowering can occur anytime from late spring until a killing frost.

Mirabilis – Four O’Clock



The other common name for these fragrant flowers is **Marvel of Peru** (*Mirabilis jalapa*), for they are native to this area of South America. The flowers can be your basic solid white, pink, red, and yellow.

There is a multi-colored variety called the **Broken Colors Series** (shown above), having stripes, splashes, smears, spots, and blemishes of different colors on the same flower. Each one has various colors, and the entire plant brightens an evening garden like the finality of a fireworks show.

Pull up a lawn chair and enjoy the colorful spectacle in your garden!

Pelargonium – Bedding Geraniums



Like the above *Mirabilis* blossoms, some varieties of our **common bedding Geraniums** flaunt psychedelic, multi-chromatic, super-duper mind-bending, 1960s tripping, petal extravaganzas.

Streaks, stripes, splotches, spots, and other descriptive words beginning with the letter “s” can apply to this geranium and many other flowers. No flower is alike, so you should enjoy every petal!

Double Your Pleasure

Mother Nature rarely forms many double-petaled flowers in the wild. In her estimation, extra petal formation is a worthless and energy-wasting process. The key activity for any flower is reproduction, and for that, you need anthers producing pollen.

Many gardeners believe those extra petals come from the growth of additional sets of the first petals. Not so, because of genetic abnormalities, what used to be stamens, have now re-developed into new petals. If some fertile stamens remain, botanists say the flower is “semi-double.” If most or all stamens re-develop into petals, the blossom is “fully double.”

Many types of plants will naturally form the occasional double-petaled flowers. Botanists think this is a genetic quirk or anomaly. These extra petals hinder visiting pollinating bees. There are also fewer amounts of pollen produced from these types of flowers. The female parts, called styles, stigmas, and ovary, are present but buried under a pile of petals.

Single-petal flowers are more accessible for insects to visit, pollinate, and get a slurp of sweet nectar. Double-petaled (or multi-petaled) blooms are a bee’s nightmare of maze-like navigation and of disappointing rewards of nectar (if any). They soon learn to avoid such flowers.

Why then, do we have so many multi-petaled flowers in our garden? Let’s be honest — they are stunningly beautiful! Plant breeders can select semi-double-flowered types and repeat re-breeding them to add more petals. Who cares about the bee’s needs or Mother Nature needing more pollen-bearing anthers? It’s all about our attraction to double, quadrupled, and “mega-drupled” petals! To some eyes, they appear flashy, but isn’t that what gardening is about — to be colorful and outlandish?

Double Begonia



Tuberous Begonias (*Begonia tuberosa* or *tuberosa hybrida*) are popular annuals usually grown for displays in a hanging basket and containers. They are tender plants and treated as annuals, even though you can save the tough, fibrous concave-shape tubers over the winter. Well, that's the theory, but the tubers may dry and die by spring. I recommend purchasing new bulbs (or potted plants) each spring in any nursery or garden center.

Most Begonias develop separate male and female plants. Male Begonias produce those colorful and flamboyant excessively “fluffy” or filly double flowers that can resemble roses. The female flowers have a less excessive number of petals — sometimes only showing single petals but expose the pistils for easy pollination.

Double Dahlia



Never underestimate the grandeur of a multi-colorful, fully double-petaled Dahlia. These composite plants will slowly unfold “petal” after “petal” starting from the outside and then towards the center depths.

Many varieties will look like a large colorful beach ball, changing the shades of colors by the time the flower head has fully expanded.

Many composite species — usually classified as being in the Aster or Daisy Family — all share this trait. Take, for example, Chrysanthemums. They will display the same pattern of expansion over several days.

Double Petunia



When viewed close-up, the folds of extra petals of some flowers, like these, can be very colorful. Your eyes look further into the flower, where it is dark and mysterious.

I believe double petunias grow best in containers instead of as bedding plants. Here you can observe the large blossoms close-up and enjoy their colorful petals.

I also feel double petunias have a short enjoyment period as compared to the single-petaled types. All those extra petals can look like sodden tissue paper after a hard rain. Not too pretty! Well, here you can have a different perspective on these flowers!

Papaver – Poppy



Oh no! We are back with the poppies again. They are a very diverse group of plants exhibiting many forms of beauty. This time, we need to see those varieties having, what some people consider, a disorganized mess of petals.

Most poppy species and varieties have single to semi-double petals. Then there are those types having billowy, fully double petals. These types will have one color, while some blend two or more colors.

One such double bicolor variety caught my eye in the garden. Called **“Candy Floss”** (shown above), it has fully-double, light pink, and pale purple petals. It looks like the flower buds exploded into large colorful roses.

If this poppy doesn't make you stop and stare, I don't know what other varieties of flowers can. Well, many types will, but I love this one! It would be best if you grew this one to appreciate the blended colors and wavy appearance.

Rosa – Double Rose



Roses always seem to look more beautiful by having extra petals. Single-petaled roses have a simplistic charm about them, but big, multi-petaled varieties always win the hearts of most people.

When growing roses in your garden, you can always find “that perfect one” both in stunning color and scent. Double roses, most often, will meet this dual classification of perfection.

Let your eyes dig deeper into those folds of petals. Uncover all the subtle shades of colors that, when viewing farther away, blend into a predominant color. In the above photo, how many differences in color within all those petals can you see?

View a rose (or any double-petaled flower) from an artist’s perspective. A professional artist can identify many shades of colors from the

painted subject. Mother Nature is such an artist using your flower garden as her canvas. Stop and stare for as long as you want at her masterpieces.

Tagetes – African Marigold



Marigolds are among the easiest flowers for gardeners to grow. The most challenging part of them is deciding which types and varieties to have in the garden.

The large-flowered varieties are **African Marigolds** (*Tagetes erecta*), while the smaller-flowered ones are the **French Marigolds** (*Tagetes patula*) even though all Marigolds originated in Mexico — go figure!

Their colors range from red to orange, gold, yellow, and off-white. Practically all varieties will become bushy and bloom all summer.

For our purpose here, some African varieties can develop huge, fully double, orange to pure yellow flowers. It would be universal news if breeders created a reddish-orange to pure red variety. The small French varieties flaunt that “hot” color in their petals.

In the meantime, let's enjoy the stunning overlapping petals on any African Marigold.

Conclusion

Although this ebook helps you explore and appreciate the small, unnoticed, fine-detailed beauty of a flower, it also extends into understanding other natural wonders.

Gardening is a beautiful way to fine-tune our senses into gaining a better perception of the world around us. There is so much more to see in a flower than what we usually view and understand. This concept also applies to anything else in our lives, but we need to realize our sensory blindness.

Train yourself into using all your senses to discover the natural “fine details” that usually go unnoticed. You can learn to identify nearby birds by listening to their songs. Feel the bark on a tree and taste the various flavors of herbs. Smell the ozone-enriched damp air after a summer thunderstorm and admire the cloud colors of a sunset or sunrise.

We engage most of our lives into auto-pilot and let the world go by unnoticed. So much beauty is passing us by, and we cannot stop and admire it. Take the time to experience and enjoy these “in plain sight” attractive features of a flower.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this publication and take its meaning to heart.

Please visit my author website at <https://gedwinvarner.com> for more information about my other gardening ebooks and contact details.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm, helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For 20 years, he successfully owned and operated a fragrant-flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries, which publish colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same writing style (thankfully with fewer words) across a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.