



Museo de las Conceptas

Una historia que enamora

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The Gardens of El Museo de las Conceptas



A Guide to the
Fascinating History of the Gardens



WPI

Table of Contents

A Brief History	3
Symbols	5
Species Profiles	6
Lavender	6
Jasmine	7
Rosemary	8
Fig Tree	9
Madonna Lily	10
Sweet Passionfruit	11
Lemon Verbena	12
Angel's Trumpets	13
Gypsy's Earring	14
Aloe	15
Plant Keys	16
Garden Maps	18
Plant User Profiles	24
Isabel Lituma	24
The Nuns of the Monastery	25
Dr. Fabian Leon	26





Dr. Fabian Leon

Dr. Leon is a professor and researcher at the University of Cuenca, and a pharmacist by trade.

According to León, his lab is “leaving behind pure ancient knowledge due to new knowledge”. He and his team extract compounds from different medicinal plants, and study them to determine the scientific backing behind their observed effects, and how they can be used in the medical field.

One example of his work is with a model for bacterial infections. To begin, he dries and processes plants known to have antibiotic



properties, puts them in an ethanol solution, and extracts the compounds to observe how bacteria react.



El Museo de Las Conceptas: A Brief History

The museum’s foundation comes from a 16th century monastery, originally owned by a wealthy Cuencan widow who felt called to bequeath her home to the Cuencan Church. Monasteries play the role of housing religious communities that live in seclusion from an often secular society. This monastery in particular sheltered cloistered nuns, who are Catholic women that have been consecrated to God. They vow to remain inside the convent for the rest of their lives and devote themselves to prayer, study, and community life. In accordance with the condition made by the Cuencan widow, the first of the cloistered nuns to live in this monastery were her three daughters. From then up until the 20th century, the monastery went on to shelter generations of cloistered nuns who, in addition to praying and studying, created magnificent pieces of art.

In 1980, the cultural department of the Central Bank of Ecuador proposed that the monastery be transformed into a museum of religious art that could display its artistic beauty to the city. The goal was to create a museum that would communicate the history and importance of religious culture to each and every visitor.

This proposal was eventually put into place and six years later, el Museo opened its doors. The museum presents a variety of immaculate work created by the nuns that lived out their lives in the monastery, as well as donations made from community to the nuns over the past 400 years. Although the monastery no longer stands, the cloistered nuns still remain, living in confined quarters of the museum, only to emerge during closed hours to clean. Along with their normal studies and devotions, these nuns pay a large contribution to maintaining the cleanliness of the facility and its artifacts. One can marvel at this upkeep while touring the 21 total exhibits present throughout the museum, 18 of which are permanent, and 3 rotational. Each of them features a large collection of religious paintings, sculptures, furniture, and toys that all pertain to a specific theme of the exhibit.



The Nuns of the Monastery



A group of nuns inhabit the monastery that is connected to the museum. They use the plants in their everyday lives, from culinary to

medicinal purposes. The monastery holds its own gardens, containing many of the same plants as the gardens, but occasionally they will use plants from the museum's gardens if needed.

For example, the nuns use plants such as rue for "bad air", and aloe for inflammation. Mother Abadesa says, in the context of what plants are the most important, that "From my vision they are all because they are the work of God each has its own detail that elevates the spirit towards the creator."

The nuns described how the gardens have changed over time, with new plants coming to Ecuador with the Europeans, and given to the monastery as gifts from religious benefactors, resulting in the diverse gardens here today.

Isabel Lituma



Isabel Lituma is a local Curandera, or healer. Every Friday, she comes to the museum to perform spiritual cleansings called “limpias”, which attract many people. She has been performing the traditional cleansing for 27 years, since the government legalized the practice. Prior, it had been illegal, due to being considered “witchcraft”.



The limpias use a large variety of 9-10 plants, many of which are contained in Las Conceptas, intended to cleanse the body of bad energy and evil spirits. For example, a plant called rue is included to ward off bad energy, and help babies sleep. In addition, the cleansings are a popular tradition during the new year, to start the new year with clean energy and spirits.



This guidebook was designed by students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in collaboration with the museum to help guests to enjoy a greater experience inside the gardens. Please take time to observe the variety of plants contained here and relax in the serene environment.

We thank you for visiting us here at El Museo de Las Conceptas.

The Symbols in This Guide



Medicinal— Any plant that has a use in healing or medicine.



Culinary— Any plant that is used in making food.



Symbolic— Any plant that is used to represent something.



Aromatherapeutic- Any plant used for therapy/ relaxation, mainly in teas, oils, or perfumes. Plants known for their scent.



Spiritual— Any plant that serves a purpose in spiritual or religious traditions, or has a backstory based in spirituality.



Lavender

Spanish Name: Lavanda

Latin Name: Lavandula



Lavender can be used as a disinfectant and antiseptic for injuries.

6



Its most common uses are due to its attractive smell. It is commonly used for aromatherapy, and assisting in sleep and stress relief.

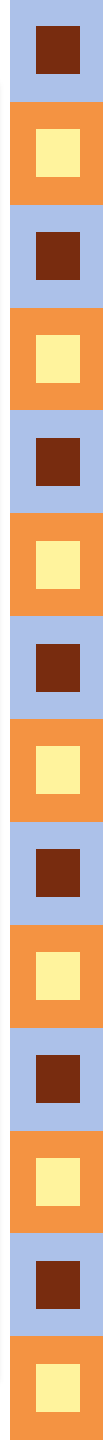
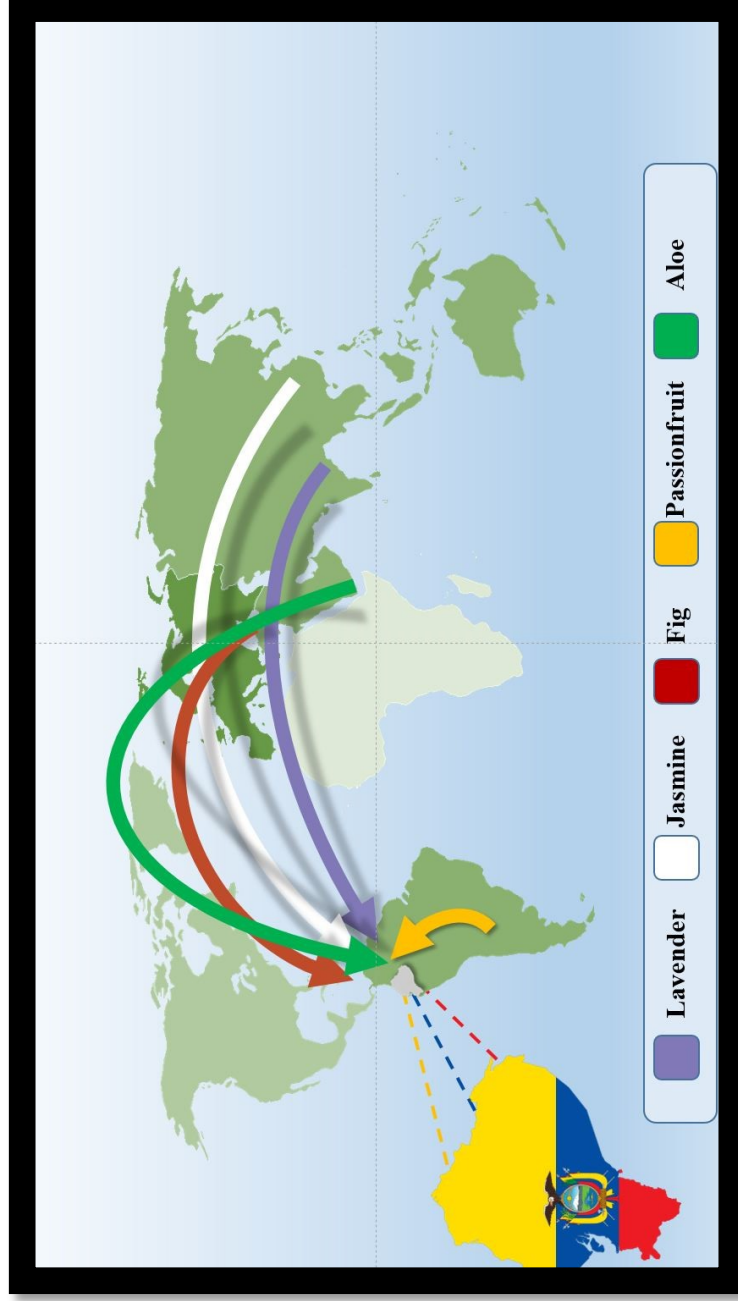
Origin

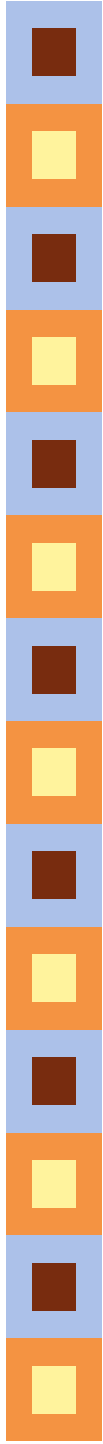
Lavender is originally from the Mediterranean, Middle East, and India. From the mint family, it is well known for its beauty, fragrance, and many uses. Due to this, lavender spread quickly across the world and is commonly cultivated today.



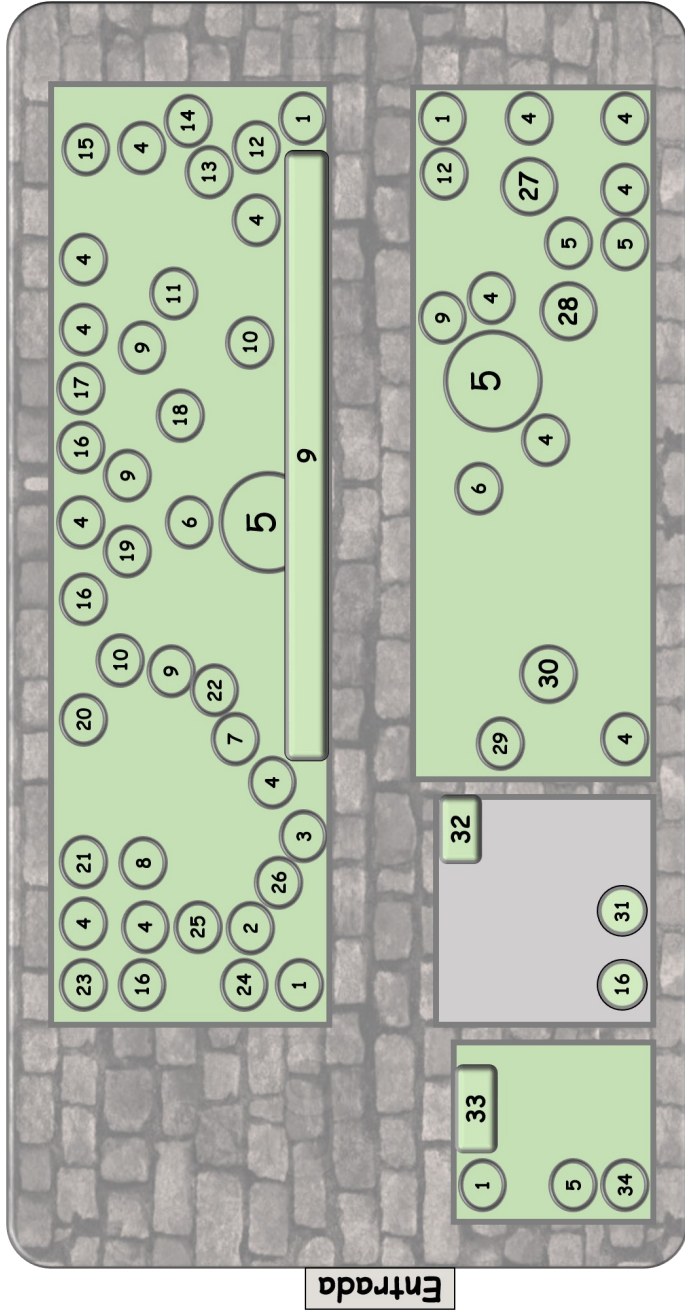
In the monastery, Lavender was used in the Garden of the Smells to ensure the smell of the cemetery did not reach the main halls.

23





Jardín de los Olores



Jasmine

Spanish Name: Jazmín

Latin Name: Jasminum

Origin

The name is derived from the Persian word "Yasmin", meaning "gift from god". It is believed to have originated in the Himalayan region of western China, and spread very quickly to warmer tropical and temperate regions of the world, due to its beauty.



Jasmine is typically used for the treatment of liver pain due to liver disease or cirrhosis, as well as general stomach/abdominal pain.

Jasmine's scent is very strong and pleasing, so it is used in many creams, lotions, and perfumes as fragrance, and can also be used in green tea.

Jasmine symbolizes many things, including purity, strength, modesty, and simplicity. It is said that the use of jasmine oil will bring these traits.





Rosemary water is good for the hair and face; and used to clear vision; and wash burns, ulcers, and rashes. You swallow the leaves and flowers in order to cure rheumatism.



Rosemary is used often to flavor foods, such as beef, pork, or stuffing.

8



Rosemary is an important plant in Limpias (spiritual cleansings). It is said to ward off diseases and evil, as well as attract good luck. It is also used to cleanse children of bad energy.



Rosemary

Spanish Name: Romero

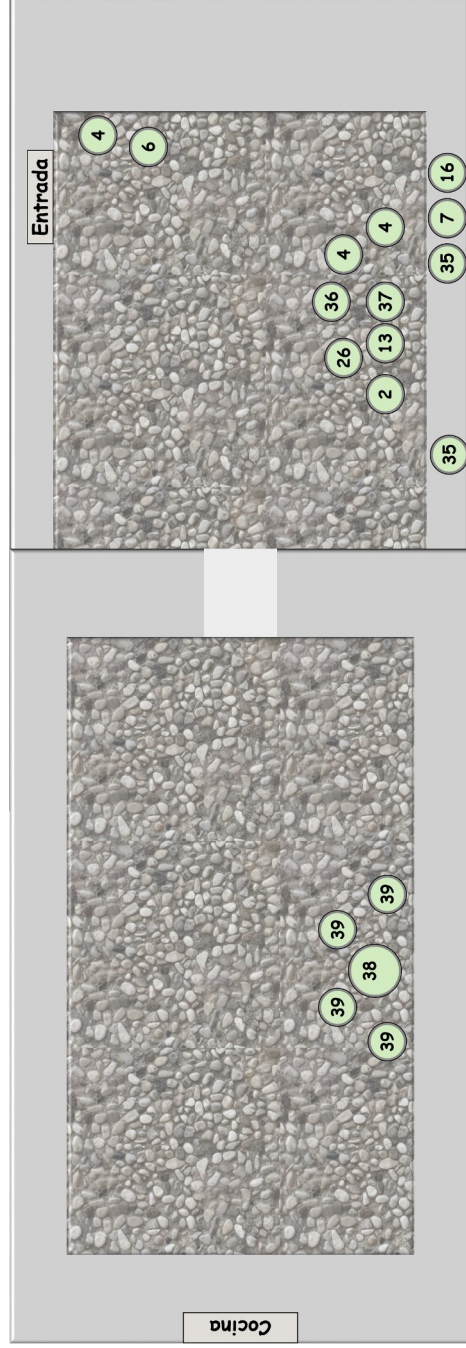
Latin Name:

Rosmarinus officinalis

Origin

The name "rosemary" derives from the Latin for "dew" (ros) and "sea" (marinus), or "dew of the sea". The plant is native to the Mediterranean area, and thrives best near the sea.

Patio de la Cocina y la Lavanderia



21



Madonna Lily

Spanish Name: Azucena
Latin Name: Lilium Candidum

The bulb of the Madonna Lily is used to create a poultice for tumors, ulcers, and external inflammations. However, it is rarely used anymore, due to the rarity of the plant.



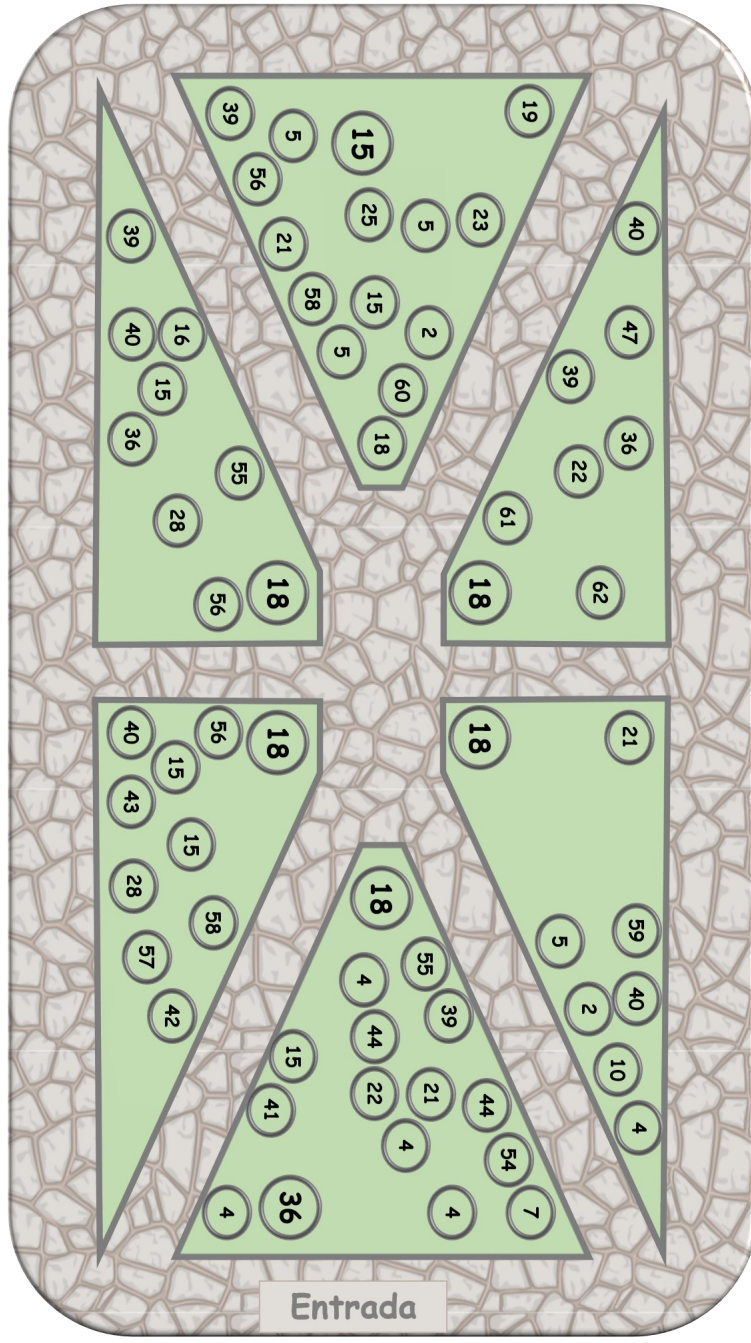
The Madonna Lily symbolizes purity in the Roman Catholic religion. Depictions of the Virgin Mary often portray her holding these flowers, or with them nearby. In addition, it is said that when Santa Mariana, the "lily of Quito" died, a bed of these flowers grew where her body lay.

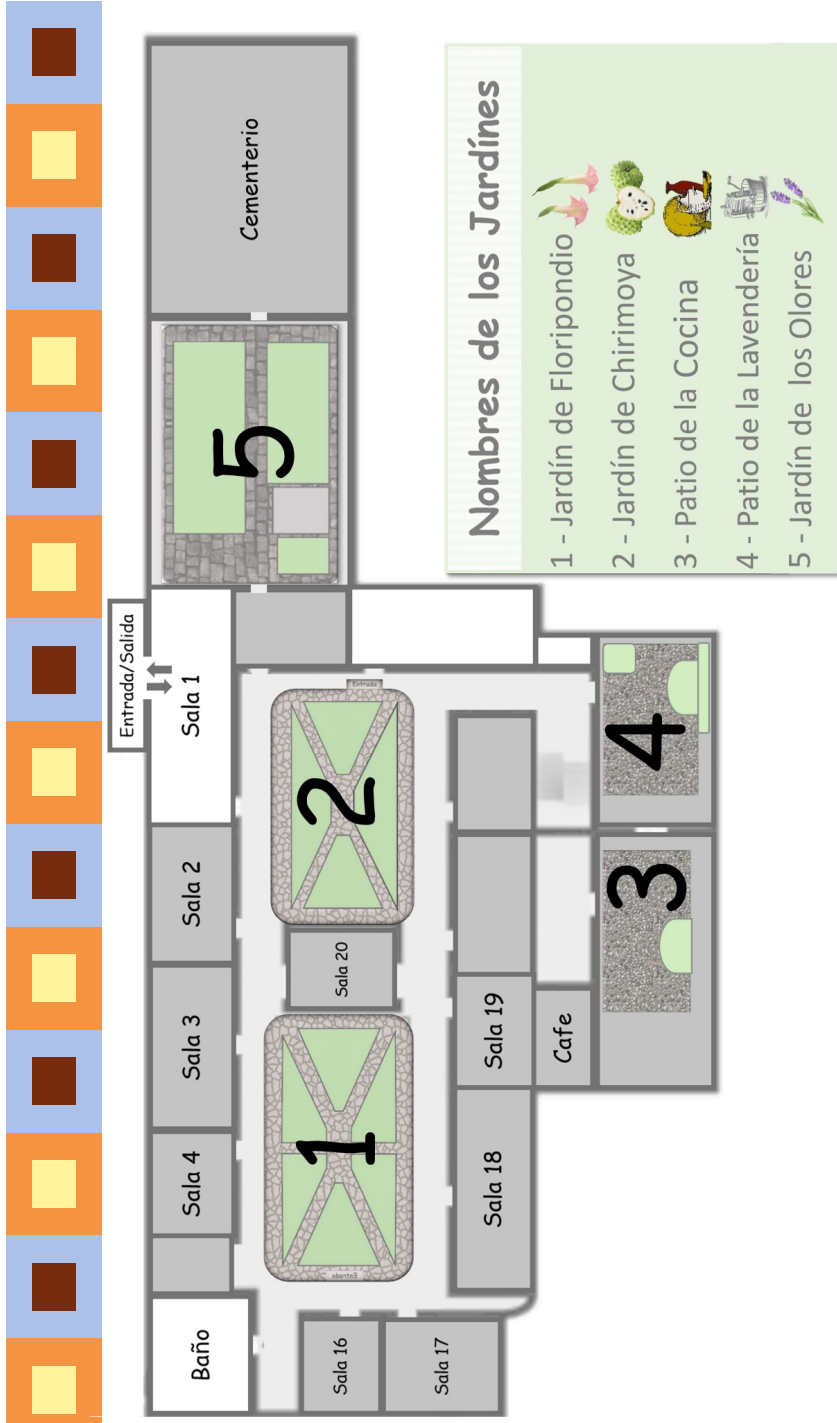


Origin

The Madonna Lily is native to the Balkans and Middle East, and has been naturalized worldwide due to its beauty.

Jardín de Floripondio





Sweet Passionfruit

Spanish Name: Granadilla

Latin Name: Passiflora Ligularis



The most common use of sweet passionfruit is as a food. The pulp inside is very sweet and rich with vitamins.

Origin

Sweet passionfruit is native to the Andes Mountains, mainly in Peru, but also including Ecuador, Bolivia, Columbia, and Venezuela.



In addition to being delicious, the seeds of the sweet passionfruit can be lightly roasted, and used to treat ulcerations.



Lemon Verbena

Spanish Name: Cedron

Latin Name: Aloysia Citrodora

Lemon Verbena leaves are often used to add lemon flavor to dishes such as poultry or salad dressings, as well as to make sorbet.



It is also commonly used in tea to add lemon flavor and scent. Also, it works as an insect repellent.



Lemon verbena is also used to help with anxiety, dysentery, and diarrhea.



















Origin

Lemon Verbena originated in South America, and in the 17th century, the Spanish brought the plant back to Europe.



Wandering Jew	33	Clivia	49	
Peruvian Ragweed	34	Hibiscus	50	
Fern	35	Milflores	51	
Angel's Trumpets	36	Cherimoya	52	
Sweet Grenadia	37	Greater Periwinkle	53	
English Walnut	38	African Lily	54	
Edible Canna	39	Mint	55	
Camellia	40	Cigar Plant	56	
Yellow Iris	41	Poinsettia	57	
Fuchsia	42	Chamomile	58	
Donkey's Ear	43	Dill	59	
Hummingbird's Fuchsia	44	Madonna Lily	60	
Sigalon	45	Escancel	61	
Mountain Papaya	46	Cucumber	62	
Jade	47			
Blume	48			

	Jasmine	1	Gypsy's Earring	17
	Chile Pepper	2	Calla Lily	18
	Rue	3	Bear's Breeches	19
	Geranium	4	Tobacco	20
	Lavender	5	Star Rain	21
	Bromelia	6	Rose	22
	Orchid	7	Rosemary	23
	Lemon Verbena	8	Lemon	24
	Violet	9	Constant Love	25
	Begonia	10	Aloe	26
	Fig Tree	11	Mint Geranium	27
	Myrtle	12	Linden	28
	Aeonium	13	Yellow Ivy	29
	Mexican Shrimp	14	Lemon Balm	30
	Hydrangea	15	Crown of Thorns	31
	Spider Plant	16	Agave	32

Angel's Trumpets

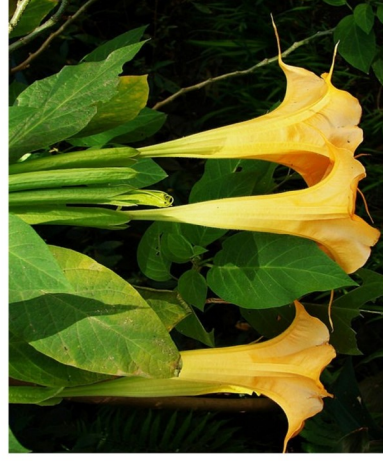
Spanish Name: Floripondio

Latin Name: Brugmansia

Heated leaves of the Angel's Trumpets can be applied to the skin to help treat many neurological conditions. In addition, the plant can have hallucinogenic effects when consumed, alongside other effects of the toxins in the plant.



There are a great deal of spiritual effects associated with Angel's trumpets, including attracting angels and spirits, and serving as a link between the human and spirit world.



Origin

Angel's Trumpets are native to the tropical regions of Ecuador, as well as the Andes. They are quite sensitive to weather, so they haven't been moved far from these locations.



Gypsy's Earring

Spanish Name: Arete de Gitana

Latin Name: Fuchsia Vulcanica



The flowers (a type called Pena Pena) can be used to relieve stomach pain, as well as treat infections.

Origin

Gypsy's Earrings are native to South America, and are one of a large variety of types of fuchsia. It gets its name from the long bunches of flowers that grow on it.



Gypsy's Earrings are used in Limpias, in the large bunches of flowers intended to ward off bad spirits and energy.



Aloe

Spanish Name: Sabila

Latin Name: Aloe Vera

Origin

Aloe is originally from the arabian peninsula, but is now grown in tropical regions worldwide, as well as grown decoratively in pots.



Aloe is used for a wide variety of medicinal purposes. Mainly, it is used as a gel to treat damaged skin and hair. It can also help with lung illnesses when boiled in milk. Additionally, there are drinks made with aloe said to balance the bodies alkalinity and help digestion and heartburn.

