Plants Send a Loving Message on Valentine’s Day
By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Mouth-watering chocolates and beautiful bouquets of cut flowers make great gifts on Valentine’s Day but are often a short-lived declaration of love. Why not give your sweetie some longer lasting sentiments in the form of seeds or plants? As they grow, they will be reminders of your thoughtful ways.

‘Valentine’ bleeding heart is a shade tolerant perennial plant sure to find a special place in your loved one’s heart. In early spring, new foliage emerges in an attractive purple hue. Stems arise and arch over slightly, forming about a 30-inch mound. The 3-lobed compound foliage takes on a greener color as it matures. Flowers are an intense coral red with white inner petals.

Another selection with the same appellation, ‘Valentine’ sunflower sports 5-inch lemon yellow blooms with chocolate centers. Plants reach 5 feet tall on strong stems. Flowers are great for cutting and attractive to pollinators.
Love-in-a-mist (Nigella spp) is a wonderful self-seeding annual with both flowers and seed pods suitable for cutting and arrangements. Flowers come in vibrant shades of blue, rose, purple and white. Fine, feathery foliage makes blossoms seem like they are floating in a wispy, green cloud.

If a small trellis or other vertical feature needs to be covered, love-in-a-puff (Cardiospermum halicacabum) might be just the ticket. Plants started indoors in March and transplanted into the garden after the last frost can grow up to 8 feet or so. Seeds can also be sown where they are to grow. In summer, sprays of delicate white flowers adorn the ferny-leaved vines. Most interesting are the green, balloon-like seedpods. Open them to find tiny black seeds stamped with white hearts.

A favorite amaranth of mine is love-lies-bleeding (Amaranthus caudatus). Three-foot high plants with oval leaves are draped in ropes of fuchsia, coral or green flowers that resemble a torrent of dreadlocks. Seeds are easy to start indoors or can be direct seeded. Love-lies-bleeding is an old-fashioned flower much in favor during Victorian times.

A gorgeous new caladium, ‘Heart & Soul’ produces pinkish-red, arrow-shaped leaves edged in green with attractive white venation. Pot up tubers mid-March in containers and keep in a warm, brightly lit area. Once the danger of frost passes, plants can be moved outdoors where they can receive up to 8 hours of morning sun. Pile these 20-inch plants into containers with complementary companions or set in-ground on semi-shaded sites.

Rose lovers look no further to convey that special message than ‘Dream Come True’. This AARS winner produces the most perfect 4-inch, yellow flowers tipped in red. The lightly fragrant flowers bloom throughout the growing season. Classified as a grandiflora rose, this plant attains a height of 5 to 6 feet and grows about 4 feet wide.

‘Scentimental’ is a shrub rose reaching 4 feet tall and wide. Perhaps, because of its heirloom parentage, the striking red and white blossoms emit an incredible sweet, spicy fragrance. Expect heavy flowering and good disease resistance.
Vegetable gardeners take heart. A good number of vegetable varieties can also be associated with this special day. In fact, there is a ‘Valentine’ grape tomato, ‘Black Valentine’ heirloom bush bean and ‘Sweet Valentine’ lettuce.

Asparagus ‘Purple Passion’ sends forth spears than have a 20 percent higher sugar content than green-speared cultivars. Like purple beans, the spears turn green when cooked.

Supersweet corn hybrids ‘Obsession’, ‘Passion’ and ‘Devotion’ all produce 8-inch ears, which are ready in about 80 days. Mini-bell peppers, ‘Eros’ and ‘Cupid’ are, respectively, yellow and red early sweet peppers. They are about 2 inches high and wide and ready in 75 days or so.

‘Little Darling’ watermelon is ready to pick in 65 to 70 days from transplanting. Five to 7 pound sweet, red-fleshed fruits are produced on 4 to 5 foot vines. Honeydew ‘Moonstruck’ is a pleaser just like the movie. Fruits are light skinned with pearly flesh about 7 inches in diameter and ready in 75 days.

Fruit lovers can select ‘Sweet Kiss’ strawberry. The 6 to 8 inch high plants are covered with pretty, white blossoms developing into shapely and delectable fruit. ‘Sweetheart’ blueberry can grow up to 6 feet high. What’s unique about this plant is that it does not require a pollinator and it is refruiting, producing a crop in late spring and again in late summer.

Those trying to please a chocoholic will be delighted to discover chocolate cosmos (Cosmos astrosanguineus). Season-long blooming plants are covered with rich, dark, lustrous, 1-inch blossoms. The fine dark chocolate scent is especially prevalent on hot, still summer days. Plants are started from tuberous roots, much like dahlias. Also, like dahlias, the roots can be stored over the winter and replanted each spring – a perpetual love story if I’ve ever heard one!

For questions about the plants listed or on other horticultural questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.