

1st of May

After a first flash that dealt with holly, you will find below-as already announced before- an interesting and broader information concerning another plant and its traditions.

A celtic celebration

The origin of this tradition is manyfolded. Possibly the oldest tradition goes back to the Celtic period where on 1st May takes place the Beltaine celebration i.e. the passage from the dark season to the bright season. It is the opposite of Samain or Halloween.

Feast of the workers

You can find the first premission thereof in the XVIIIth century during the French revolution. However, it is in 1882 in the United States that the idea of a claiming day for the workers started to emerge in order to get a reduction of the working time of 8 hours a day i.e. 48 hours a week.

In 1886, following the call of the American Labour federation, 350,000 workers stopped working to claim a 8 hour day. The demonstration ended by a massacre in the quarter of Haymarket in Chicago.

In 1889, the second worker international created the 1st of May as an international Day for the workers to claim their rights.

In 1891, at the occasion of the first French and international action day of the 1st May, soldiers shot on the striking people in Fourmies in the North of France. There were 9 dead people among the striking workers.

It is so with violence and blood that the celebration of the workers was born, which rapidly was also organised in most countries.

The tradition of the bunch with lilies of the valley

Following the happynings in Fourmies, people put a red wildrose in the button hole while marching on 1st May in order to remember the blood spilt and in reference of Fabre d'Églantine.

In Paris, in 1907 this flower was replaced by a bunch of lilies of the vally with a red ribbon. The tradition of the bunch of the lily of the valley was maintained up to our days.

In 1920 the Bolstevik Regime in Russia decided that the 1st of May would be in the future a day of vacation and would become the legal celebration of the workers.

Today, the 1st of May is a holiday in most of the countries, especially in Europe.

It is the only day during the year where everybody is authorised to sell lilies of the valley on the streets without paying tax. The condition, however, is that the lily of the valley comes from one's garden or from the forest and has no root.

This tradition is still very lively despite the opposition of the horticulturists, who complain against the competition.

The tradition of the May or the Maytree

The 1st May corresponds to the period of the year where nature suddenly explodes: All the birds of passage are back again and sing very loudly in order to select their future bride, numerous flowers open in the parks, gardens, fields, forest, along the roads, and the trees are now covered with leaves. It is therefore the right moment to celebrate after the hard winter months.

In numerous villages young men have the tradition to "faire the mais" i.e. they go and cut a bunch that they plant during the night preceding the 1st of May in front of the house of the woman they would like to honour and ask for marriage.

In certain villages it happens that young people go through the village and take all the objects, materials that are not taken away and heap them up on a central place. You can find there all together cars, plows, gardentools, pots, flowerpots, chairs, tables, parasols, bicycles etc....

These feative traditions go far back in the past, but they have difficulties to survive today.

Attention be carefull that young children do not put a lily of the valley in their mouth because these flowers are very toxic. The lily of the valley is not part of the numerous flowers which you can eat, despite the fact that its parfum is very delicious.

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