



Story of the Sacred Lotus

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The Sacred Lotus



The Sacred Lotus has a scientific name *Nelumbo nucifera* and it belongs to a plant family *Nelumbonaceae*.^{1,2} It is known by a number of other names, including **blue lotus**, **Indian lotus**, **bean of India**, and **sacred water-lily**. This plant is an aquatic perennial, native to Asia from modern Afghanistan to Vietnam, and to New Guinea and north Australia, and it was introduced to ancient Egypt from Persia late in the ancient Egyptian history. It has been held sacred by the native people for more than 5000 years and used widely by them as an ornamental and food plant. Today it is rare or extinct in the wild in Africa, but it is widely naturalized and commonly cultivated in water gardens around the world. It is the **National Flower** of **India** and **Vietnam**.

Botany

The *Nelumbo nucifera* grows in the shallow ponds, lagoons, marshes and flooded fields, with roots in the muddy soil and leaves floating on top of the water surface. The flowers are usually found on thick stems rising several centimeters above the water. The plant grows up to 6 m in height, depending on the depth of water, and spreads horizontally up to 3 meters. The leaves may be as large as 60 cm in diameter, while the flowers can be up to 20 cm in diameter.

There are a number of different varieties of the plant, with the flower colours varying from snow white to yellow, light pink and blue. The plant can be grown from seeds or rhizomes. The oldest

seed that has been germinated into a viable plant was from a 1,300-year-old lotus fruit, taken from a dry lake in northeastern China.

Uses

The flowers, seeds, young leaves and rhizomes are all edible. In Asia, the petals are sometimes used for food decorations, while the large leaves are used to wrap food. The rhizome is a common soup or stir-fry ingredient and is the part most commonly eaten. Petals, leaves, and rhizome can also all be eaten raw, but without being cooked there is a risk of parasites transmission. That is why it is recommended to cook them first before being eaten. Chinese people have long known that Lotus roots are a very healthy food and have been using them to promote health for many centuries. They are rich in fiber, vitamin C, vitamin B and various minerals, while low in saturated fat.

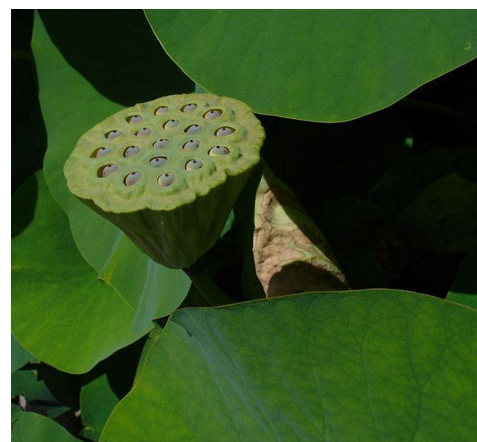


The stamens can be dried and made into a fragrant herbal tea or used to scent the tea leaves. The lotus seeds or nuts are quite versatile, and can be eaten raw or dried and popped like popcorn. They



can also be boiled down until soft and made into a paste. Combined with sugar, lotus seed paste is one of the most common ingredients used in pastries such as mooncakes and rice flour pudding.

Lotus roots are eaten as a vegetable. Various parts of the sacred lotus are also used in traditional Asian herbal medicine, and Lotus seeds called Phool Mhukhana are used in Indian cooking. The distinctive dried seed heads, which resemble spouts of watering cans, are widely sold throughout the world for decorative purposes and for dried flower arranging.



Religious symbolism



From ancient times a lotus has been a divine symbol in Hindu tradition. It is often used as an example of divine beauty and its unfolding petals suggest the development of the soul. The Hindu deities are often depicted with lotus flowers as their seats, and the meditating yogis traditionally sit in the lotus posture (*padmasana*).

Based on the ancient Hindu tradition, a lotus flower is also among the earliest Buddhist symbols. A lotus flower represents an enlightened being, Buddha or Bodhisattva, rising above the muddy waters of the world. The Buddha is often depicted sitting on a giant lotus blossom.

According to one legend, Siddhartha Gotama was born with the ability to walk and everywhere he stepped, lotus flowers bloomed. According to another story, a few days after he attained the Supreme Enlightenment the Buddha contemplated on what to do next. At first he was very reluctant to teach the Dhamma, as most people are caught up in sense pleasures and don't want to learn the deep truth and practice. But then he discerned a few people who had only a little delusion and craving, and they reminded him of the lotuses that extend their stalks from the bottom of the pond up

in the air, to receive sunshine. So out of compassion he decided to teach the Dhamma to those willing to listen and learn.³



*“Upon a heap of rubbish in the roadside ditch,
blooms a lotus fragrant and pleasing.”*

(Buddha, Dhp 58)⁴

The Buddha taught the Dhamma using words and also in a silent way, using flowers and other wordless means.⁵



Its place in the natural ecosystems

Lotus species is an integral part of the tropical wetland ecosystems and many species of wildlife depend on it for survival.

Due to the current climate change many coastal wetland ecosystems, such as Kakadu wetlands, may be severely damaged through inundation with sea water. Helping to alleviate the climate change is an act of boundless kindness to thousands of species that depend on coastal ecosystems for survival.



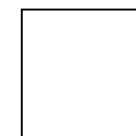
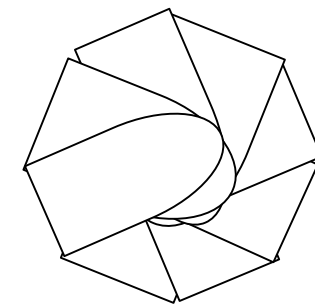
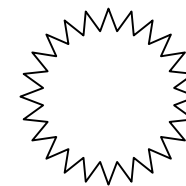
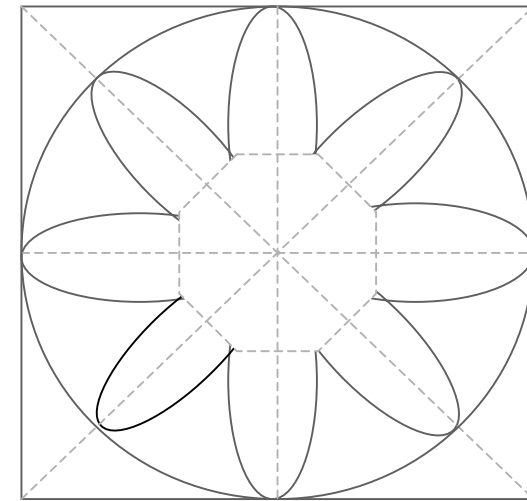


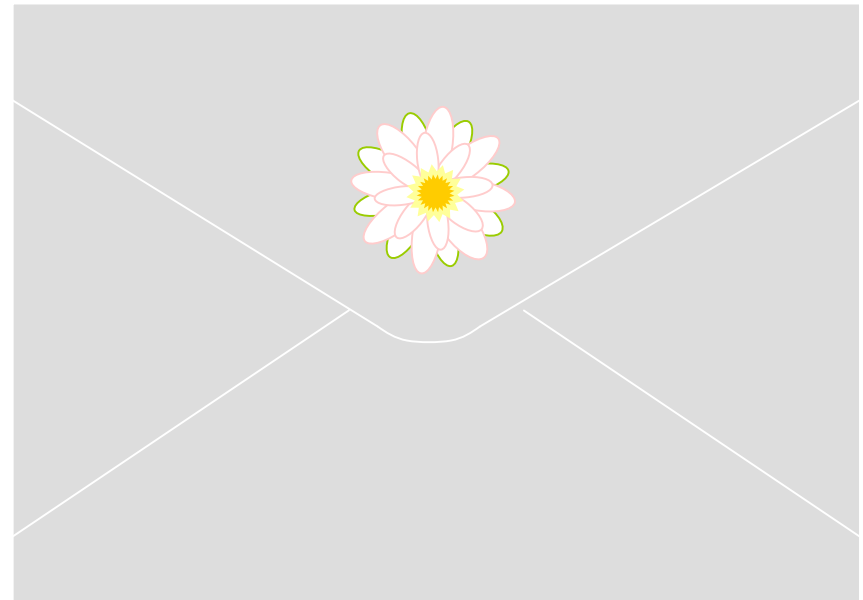
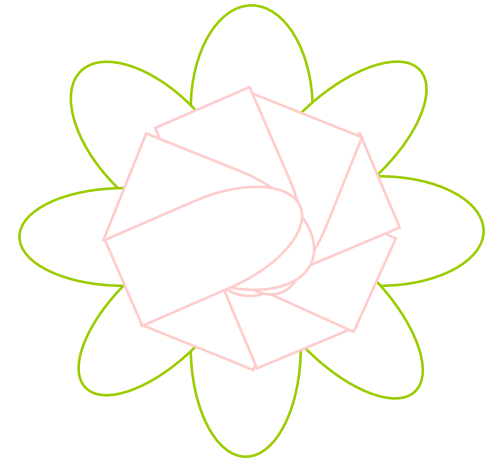
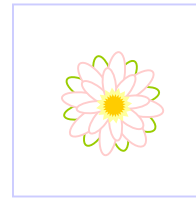
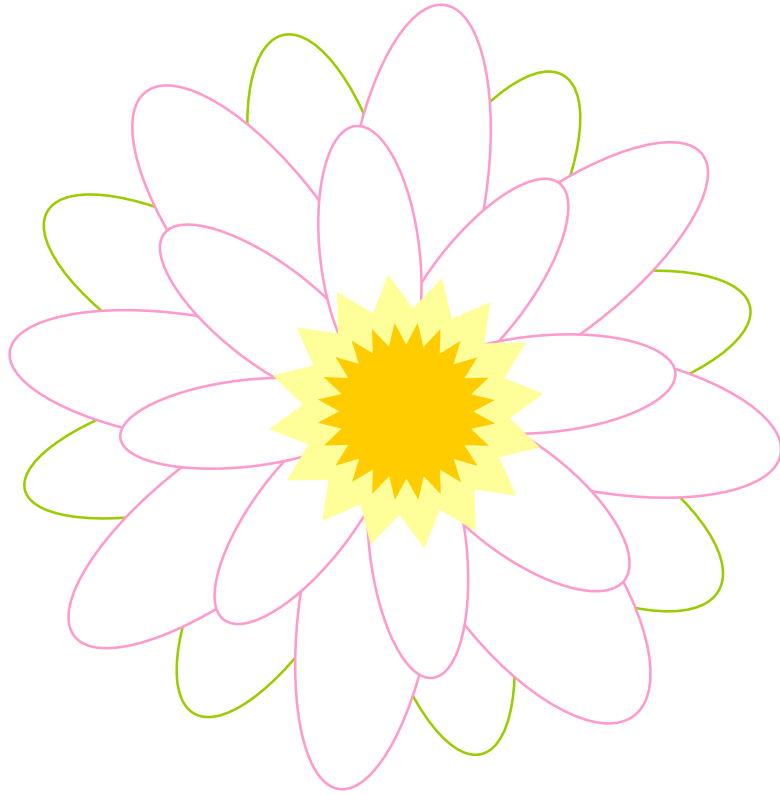
Kakadu National Park, NT, AUS



Paper lotus flower

1. Fold a paper square as shown (---) and cut out a circle.
2. To make a whorl of petals, cut out an 8-petal flower out of this circle.
3. Use a smaller square of paper to make an inner whorl of petals, in the same way.
4. Make one whorl of sepals in the same way as the petals. Colour one side of the sepals green.
5. Make one or more small fringed circles for the innermost part of the flower (carpels and stamens). Colour them yellow.
6. Paste the outer whorl of petals on the top (center) of the whorl of sepals. Paste the inner whorls on the center of the outer whorls, from the largest to the smallest.
7. Write birthday wishes or other greetings on a small piece of paper and place it inside the flower.
8. Systematically close the flower in a clockwise or an anti-clockwise way, and put it into an attractive box or envelope.





References

1. Nelumbo nucifera. Encyclopedia Wikipedia 2007, www.wikipedia.org
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