

Flowers as Fashion

By Sherry Winkinhofer, Northwest Missouri Model A Ford Club

In the modern world, we think of corsages and boutonnieres as fresh flowers worn for formal occasions such as weddings or proms. But in the Model A days, they were a much more common sight. Fresh floral arrangements were still the thing for those formal occasions, but artificial flowers were very visible in day-to-day life.

Please note that in this article, we are going to focus only on the use of flowers for fashions other than hats. Flowers as ornamentation on hats was extensive and as such, should be the subject of an article all on its own.



-Sears Spring and Summer 1928

Imitation flowers were quite popular for home interior decoration in the Victorian era, and quickly made the transition to wearable art. Flowers were worn on hats, dresses, and coats. Both single blossoms and clusters of flowers were popular. These bouquets could be made from a vast variety of materials. Common textiles used were silk, cotton, organza, organdy, rayon, velvet, and even leather. Ribbon blossoms were also utilized.



- Montgomery Ward Fall and Winter 1928-29

Corsages were a staple of the well-dressed woman. The word "corsage" is French and in the 19th-century it was a common term for a woman's bodice or jacket. Flowers pinned to the bodice were often referred to as "bouquet de corsage," and over time this phrase was shortened to just "corsage."



- Robert Simpson Fall and Winter 1928-29



10-877 Large double orchid, among the newest and most beautiful corsage flowers. Looks well on dress or coat. Orchid, lavender, red. Price delivered..... 50¢

"Looks well on dress or coat" says the text.



10-876 Metal ribbon flower. Gold or silver color. Very pretty on dresses. Price del'd 45¢

This one is of metallic ribbon.



10-872 Velvet camelia flower for corsage bouquet. Attractive and popular. Old rose, pink, white, red. Price delivered.. 29¢

Colorful flowers made of velvet.



10-878 Dainty silk flower and a silk crepe handkerchief to match. Maise, rose, pink, red. Price delivered in box... 75¢

A set with a handkerchief to match the silk flower.

- Items directly above are from The Robert Simpson Co. Catalog Fall and Winter 1928-29.

“Boutonniere” is also a French word, meaning buttonhole, and in most references, it is indicating a flower worn in the buttonhole on the lapel of a man’s suit. But I found floral women’s accessories titled boutonnières.

The text for the boutonnières to the right clearly indicates that these are meant for ladies’ fashion. The first says “...made for coat or dress” and the one to the far right is “...flowers for coats, furs or dresses.” And I can’t imagine the below boutonnières being worn by a gentleman.



A unique boutonniere made from “Genuine Kid Leather”.
- The Chicago Mail Order Company Winter 1929-30



For a more unusual type of flower, you could buy this kit for a crystal beaded boutonniere.
- January 1929 edition of Modern Priscilla magazine



- Sears Spring and Summer 1930.



- The Chicago Mail Order Company Winter 1929-30



These accessories were not always small; for example, this velvet and organdy bunch measures about 6 x 8 inches.

- Montgomery Ward Spring and Summer 1931



Other styles of bouquets include “crescents” and “sprays.”

- Montgomery Ward Fall and Winter 1929-30

One new reference I ran across was for "Trails" or "Trailers." This apparently refers to the loose, flowing style of these attachments.

The Gorrings' catalog page to the right has an illustration of a young lady wearing a long floral trail. It seems to be attached at the shoulder and then lays loose the remainder of its length.

Shorter versions of this style were also used, as illustrated in the below catalog picture.

Flowers
Rose Trailer
In Lovely Colors
 20 C 1086— Length about 12 in. **55¢**
COLORS: Flame; pink; light blue; Nile green; orchid; tan; white. State color. Ship. wt., 3 oz.
 Petals are of velvet and shaded organdie—some trailing gracefully at the ends of silvered cords. Velvet leaves match pastel shades of rose. Delightful for your new fall outfit. Our price is low for the quality.
55¢
 - Montgomery Ward
 Fall and Winter 1928-29

FLOWER DEPT. **Gorrings** **FIRST FLOOR**

F. 35. Delicate arranged as Bridalmaid's Crown, Ball or Silver Tassel Lace, finished with foliage and meshwork **18,9**

F. 36. Large Velvet Rose with soft colored mesh in Pink, Carmine, Blue or Mauve. Price **9/11**

F. 37. Russian Rose and Brilliant Hair Band. Price **14/9**

F. 38. Delicate Ribbon Tassel to match in Pink, Yellow or Tan. Price **9/11**

F. 39. Water Lily, Dutch or other flower in Pink, Mauve, White or Yellow. Price **8/11**

F. 40. Mistletoe and Fuchsia arranged in Pink and Blue. Price **12/9**

F. 41. Embroidered mesh. 20 C 1087. Velvet, Hosiery and Mesh, with green tinsel mesh. Price **12/9**

Many other Bouquets and Trails may be seen in our Flower Department on the First Floor.

Telephone: 400. Victoria. Direct to all Departments.

FREDERICK GORRINGE, Ltd.

- Gorrings' Catalog Autumn 1928

Coats were a common place to find flowers elegantly displayed on the collar. The examples below illustrate the usual placement on the left side. A single large flower or a bouquet of smaller blooms were both common options.

19-755 Seal Fur Trimmed \$25.95 Size 16 to 20

The Ocean Queen

19-225 All-Wool Point Twill \$13.95

39.98

-The Robert Simpson Catalog Fall & Winter 1928-29

-The Robert Simpson Co. Catalog Spring French Canadian Edition 1928

-Chicago Mail Order Company Winter 1929-30

-Montgomery Ward Fall & Winter 1929-30

-The Robert Simpson Co. Catalog Spring & Summer 1931

Dresses were another item that could often be found with flowers providing the final touch, on a shoulder, a neckline, or even on the dress sash. Here are a few examples from era catalogs:

Lapel corsages or boutonnieres, worn on the left side of the collar.

Corsages worn at the shoulder could be a little larger. The colors could compliment or match the dress.



-Chicago Mail Order Co. Winter 1929-30

- Montgomery Ward Spring and Summer 1930



- National Bellas Hess Catalog Spring and Summer 1931



-The Robert Simpson Catalog Fall & Winter 1928-29



-Chicago Mail Order Co. Winter 1929-30

Flowers worn at the neckline tended to be smaller corsages or single blooms with minimal or no additional trimmings.



- Simpson Spring and Summer 1931



- National Bellas Hess Spring Summer 1931



Last, but not least, here are a few examples drawn from advertisements found in magazines throughout the era. They illustrate the use of flowers in different social settings. It's apparent they were not worn just for formal occasions such as dances and parties, but instead were a part of everyday life.



- August 1928 Good Housekeeping ad for linens.



- August 1928 Good Housekeeping ad for a dentist.



- October 1929 Cosmopolitan Body by Fisher ad



- June 1928 Farm and Fireside article on gardening.



- June 1929 Good Housekeeping luggage ad

I hope this article brings new understanding and new inspiration in the use of flowers in recreating that era image. Feel free to add big and bold or small and delicate floral touches to your next Model A fashion outing!

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