

# A stranger in deep purple

A chance encounter with a mysterious deep purple flower at a wedding sends our flower-loving reporter on a quest to uncover its identity

**MARIANNE DE NAZARETH**

**R**esidents of Bengaluru are a flower loving populace in general. Florists can open shop anywhere in the city and spark off a roaring business, and today a bouquet of flowers can even be a wedding gift. No wonder then that the variety and choice of cut flowers is always changing and any new bloom evokes interest and excitement.

For instance, at a recent silver wedding anniversary celebration in the city, the 'brides' choice of colours were pink and purple. Standing out in the flower decorations was a majestic purple bloom which blended well with the pink lilliums and carnations. Here and there adding the typical Bengaluru touch were 'wood roses' painted a glittering silver. However, no one paid attention to the purple flower surmising it to be some sort of artificial bloom made out of Chinese silk, as the couple were settled abroad.

It was only on closer inspection (read manual feeling of the flower petals), and checking of the very delicate calyx, that the guests realised that the blooms were for real! No

one at the celebrations had seen the flower before and it created a lot of interest as a good number of the guests assembled were flower lovers. Curiously, no one present, including the hosts, could give us the name of the flower, except that it had come in that morning from Ooty.

"When I first saw the flower I too thought it was made of silk and imported. Only on touching and feeling it did I realise to my surprise it was for real," said Angela the hostess of the evening.

"Since the 'bride' was particular about purple, I was delighted to find this exact same shade as her dress," explained florist Patricia D'souza. "It was just a lucky stumble. I had gone to this small supplier looking for a bloom which was not dyed, but a real purple and found this flower. You can also find them in white and a blend of white and pink."

"The flower lasts for a week if the stalks are trimmed and the water is changed," reveals Dr Norma Prabhu who is also a florist. "They can last for 10-12 days and along with the pink lilliums and carnations can make a wonderful scented display. However the flower itself is not scented."



The quest for the identity of the rare bloom then led to a flora e-group run by Tanay Bose, research and teaching assistant, Department of Botany, University of British Columbia, who identified it as the *Eustoma grandiflorum* from the Gentianaceae family. "The common names are Tulip Gentian, Lisianthus, Texas Bluebell, Prairie Gentian," revealed Ajinkya Gadave another member of the group.

"The cut flower market in Ooty normally grows only roses, lilliums, orchids, gerbras and carnations for

the Bengaluru market. The *Eustoma* is a new entrant and is grown in hot houses in Ooty in small quantities as it is not known if they are as hardy as roses and carnations to transport. Growers are also feeling the market as most people are accustomed to common flowers and we must see if packing costs of the *Eustoma* are extra," reveals Dr M Jawaharlal, Professor and HOD Floriculture and Landscaping, Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

"The flower is seasonal and grows from June to August in Ooty,

during the wet season" says V Venkatesh a florist. "It is a new flower in the market and is not yet grown in large quantities."

The *Eustoma grandiflorum* or the Texas Bluebell is definitely a breathtaking sight, and could make a change from the overdose of Gerbra, Roses, orchids and Gladioli that we have at most of our celebrations. And florists can avoid the dyeing of white flowers to blue which is the common mode of 'matching' colours required for weddings in Bengaluru's celebrations.

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