

MINI POSTER

Plant Spirits, Gnomes & the Language of Leaves

For as long as people have kept plants close, they have told stories about who lives among them. These are the stories, kept as stories.

The Green Man

A face made of leaves, carved into churches and inns across Europe since the Middle Ages. Read as the spirit of returning growth: the forest that grows back no matter what.

Kodama of Japan

Spirits said to live in very old trees. Cutting one brought misfortune; a tree that answered an echo was thought to house one. A reminder to listen to a plant before acting.

Tomte and nisse

Scandinavian household guardians, small and bearded, who looked after the farm if you left them porridge at midwinter. Offend them and the butter would not churn.

How the garden gnome got here

Ceramic gnomes were first made in Thuringia, Germany in the 1800s. Sir Charles Isham brought 21 to Lamport Hall, England in 1847; one, Lampy, survives and is insured for a small fortune.

Celtic and Slavic plant folk

Hawthorn was a faerie tree not to be cut; rowan by the door kept ill luck away. In Slavic tales the leshy ruled the forest and could lead you in circles if you failed to show respect.

Household protectors

Rosemary by the door, basil on the sill, aloe hung above the entrance in parts of the Mediterranean and Latin America: plants people trusted to keep a home safe.

The language people gave to plants

PLANT	WHAT IT CAME TO MEAN	PLANT	WHAT IT CAME TO MEAN
Rosemary	Remembrance, loyalty	Ivy	Fidelity, friendship that clings
Fern	Sincerity, hidden magic	Moss	Maternal love, patience
Orchid	Refined beauty, rare love	Peace lily	Peace, sympathy, renewal
Aloe	Healing, protection	Bamboo	Strength through flexibility
Jade	Prosperity, friendship	Lavender	Devotion, calm

Whatever you believe about spirits, the habit behind these stories is a good one: pay attention, ask before you act, and treat living things as company rather than decor.