

# BLESSED flowers for PUJA days!

Every year, Maa Durga's arrival at her mortal abode brings happiness, prosperity, and boundless blessings to all her children. They await the auspicious arrival, and as Durga finally descends on earth, it is a cause for celebrations. According to Hindu belief, the goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahishasura saved the universe, and mankind bows before her in reverence for her courage. No stone is left unturned in this cause, and needless to say, the spirit is infectious.

For days, sacred rituals and ceremonies are performed, bringing spiritual renewal. Amongst all the pomp and circumstance, devotion for Maa Durga is absolute as her devotees offer special prayers that reflect deep reverence, respect, and honour for their goddess.

Flowers are a crucial element of these prayers, for every bloom used in ceremonies holds special significance. In preparation for these special occasions, Hindu women plan months in advance. And why not? One must appear before their beloved goddess in their best possible appearance!

Pujaseason means traditional dressing is the order of the day. What could be a better ornament than flowers to adorn one's hair and body for the blessed occasion.

For those sacred days of Durga Puja, most begin with hibiscus, blood red in colour and symbolic of Maa's essence — fierce and fearless. On Maha Shashthi and Maha Saptami, devotees offer prayers using white flowers of all kinds, divine and sacred, just like the deities. Sheuli — fragrant and dainty — symbolises the goddess's return to earth and looks absolutely divine when worn in the hair and as jewellery. White jasmine gajras and garlands beautifully complement white cotton sarees, complete with alta on the feet!

For Ashtami, wearing a pink or white lotus

in the hair looks simply spectacular as one channels Maa's grace and valour. Women cover their khopas with pink lotuses and wear garlands on their hands to truly capture the emotions.

Navami, the ninth and most important part when final prayers are offered, is a heady occasion. To reflect that spirit of joy, vibrant flowers such as marigolds and chanpa are offered for their positive energy and joyful aura. Women of the household wear long garlands of marigolds to match their bright red saree or around their wrists and necks as precious jewels, for they are no less.

And along comes Dashami. The perfect finale to commemorate Maa's departure. Red roses, hibiscus, and oleander are favoured for their strength, vitality, and beauty, and pair the "laal paar shada saree" beautifully. And thus, devotees channel the divine spirit of Maa Durga and carry it forward for yet another year.

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