



(The Beauty of Tea Leaf with)

# Botanical Embossments

by Eleanor Washburn, Member, Education Committee

*"In all things of Nature there is Something of the Marvelous"., .Aristotle, 384-322 BC*

**BOTANICAL:** relating to the science of botany, a study of plants and plant life

**EMBOSSMENTS:** decorative designs, raised above the surface, raised in relief

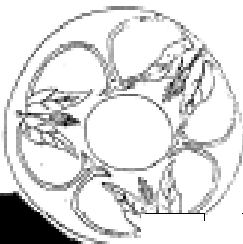
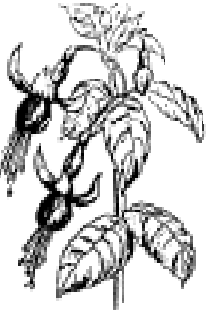
Have you ever wondered, as I have, just where the inspiration or idea came from to use real plant life as models for botanical embossments on ironstone? Was it the potter, mold maker or perhaps the potter's or mold maker's wife who loved flowers and gardening? Nature provides us with food for our bodies and just as important, beauty for our eyes and souls in the form of plants.

Since the beginning of recorded history, plants-particularly flowering plants-have strongly influenced mankind in aesthetic ways. Painting and sculpture, literature and music, architecture, weaving and designs of every sort reflect the endless forms of their beauty. The ancient Egyptians were among the earliest of races who recognized the appeal of flowers. After settling down to live in the Valley of the Nile, they cultivated food crops and followed that success with ornamental flowering plants to brighten their land and homes, Since that long-vanished era, it is interesting to note that many of our favorite flowering plants of today are natives of the Old World. It is also natural that the more one knows about these plants the greater the marvels of plant life and history become.

Just as Anthony Shaw was, to our current belief, premier in using the Tea Leaf motif (which he called Lustre Band with Sprig), he was also one of the first, if not the first, to apply the Tea Leaf to botanically embossed body styles Lily-of-the-Valley and Bordered Fuchsia, both in the 1860's.

The **LILY-OF-THE-VALLEY**, *Convallaria Majalis*, mentioned in the Song of Solomon 2:1, grows well in a shady area, produces stems of small white exquisitely fragrant bell-like flowers in May and has long been a garden favorite. Perhaps it was a favorite of Anthony Shaw too since the details of the embossments are so very realistic and so easily identified by the collector.

At top left: Lily-of-the-Valley embossment on Anthony Shaw pitcher; right: Shaw covered butter dish with strong, clear embossment and lustre band but NO Tea Leaf (perhaps embossment and lustre band outline left no space for Tea leaf-or was it just forgotten? Below left: Lily-of-the-Valley from The Fragrant Year by Helen Van Pelt Wilson & Leonie Bell; right: Lily-of-the-Valley group by Anthony Shaw-top, cup & saucer, tea set, gravy; bottom, honey dish, relish, waste bowl, mug. From collection of Eleanor Washburn.



The same is true of **BORDERED FUCHSIA**. Examine a piece closely, if you're fortunate enough to own pieces of these body styles, and notice the leaf and flower structure. Better yet, compare the Fuchsia embossment with a real hanging plant at your garden center or on your shady porch.

As you will see, the flowers are very showy and hang in small clusters or singularly. This plant was named for a German Botanist and Physician, Leonard Fuch, 1501-1566.

Far left top: Fuchsia 'Black Prince' from The World Book of House Plants by Elvin McDonald; below: startling Bordered Fuchsia teapot by Anthony circa 1860. Collection: Dale Abrams