

Grasse - The town that perfumed the World!

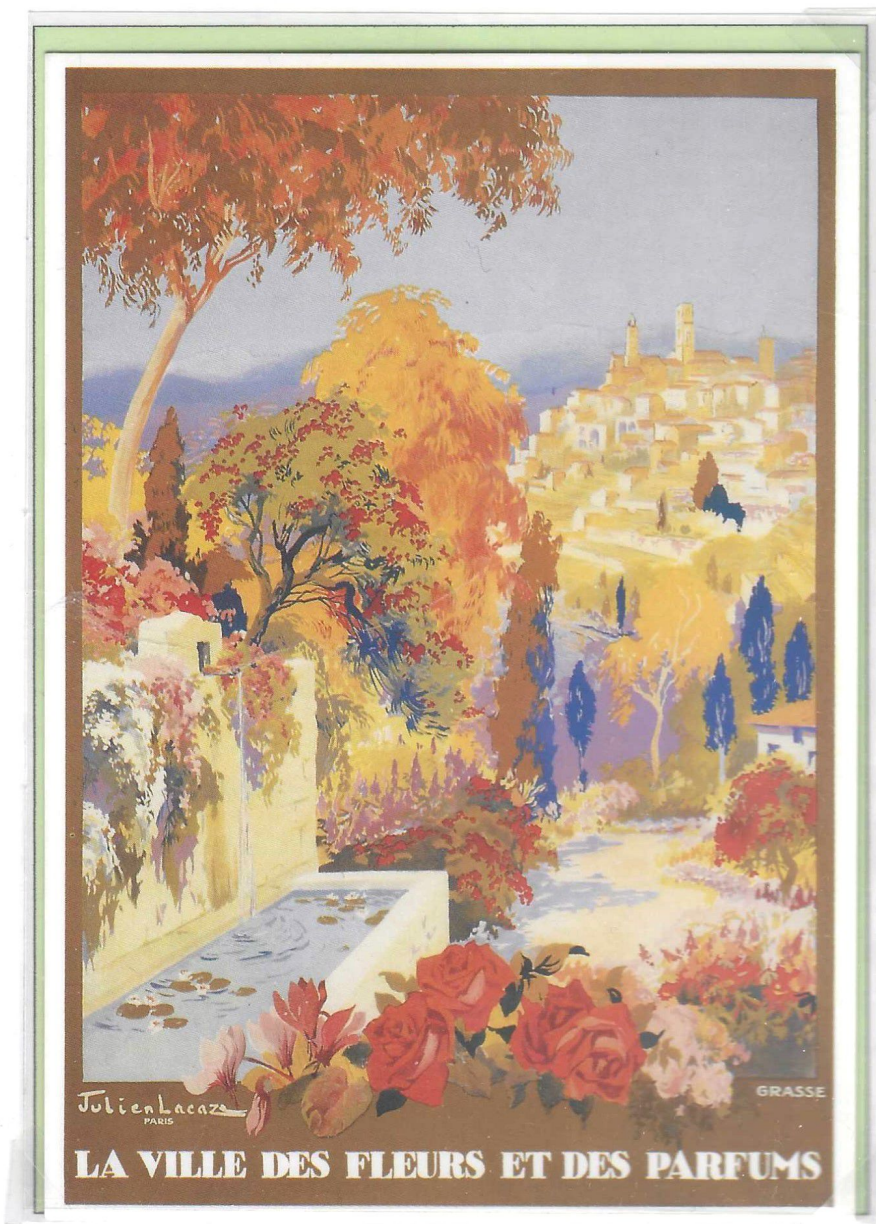
Grasse, located in Provence, France, with its mild climate, abundant sunshine together with regular rainfall and fertile soils make this area ideal for growing flowers. This has led to Grasse being synonymous with the mention of the word 'parfum'. At different times of the year one is likely to see fields of tuberose, violets, rows of cassie and jasmine, orchards of orange blossom or hillsides covered in lavender. Women, with their nimble fingers, were up at the first light of day harvesting these beautifully scented blossoms while the men undertook the carriage of blossoms to the factories or the loading of flowers into stills.

Scope

A brief history of how Grasse came to be associated with perfume, the propagation of flower crops and the processes involved to extract fragrances and the legacy that Grasse now exploits.

Reproduction of 1910 Tourist travel poster
by Julien Lacaze (1886-1971)

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Chromolithograph Les Editions Gilletta Nice Circa 1960



Orchidee Collection de Grasse
Eau de Toilette

References:

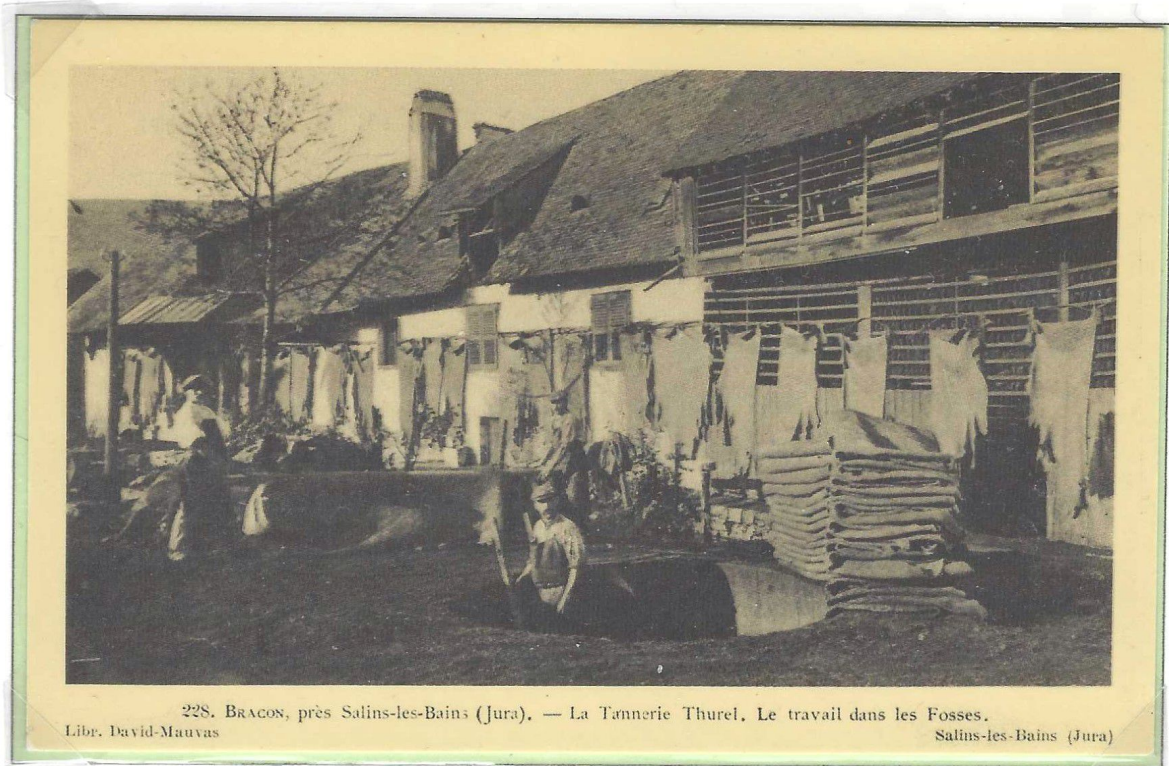
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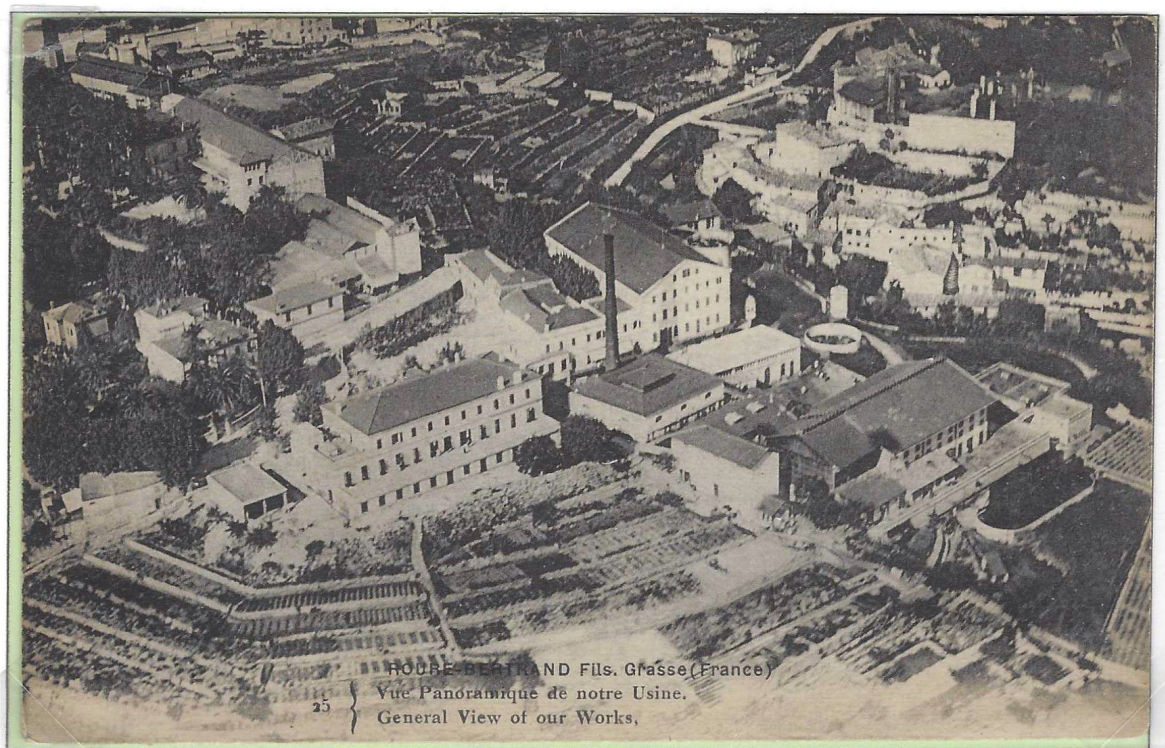
Grasse in Transition

Tanneries were established in Grasse around the 1500's. Although Grasse was known for its leather production it was a tanner in the 18th Century who had the idea of perfuming his leather gloves. This was the impetus for the very rapid expansion of producing perfumes from local flowers.



Photolithograph Edite par Cecodi – Palaiseau

Over time the small family perfume distilling enterprises made way for large scale production. Many of the nunneries and monasteries of Grasse were bought and converted to large scale perfume manufacturing factories, while small plots of land throughout Grasse provided for intensive flower production.



Collotype Publisher unknown Circa 1910

Bruno Court and Fragonard

The Bruno Court perfumery was established in 1812 making it one of the oldest establishments surviving into the 20th Century. Its success lay in the abundance of flowers in the Grasse region and the company's ability to produce essential oils through steam distillation. In 1964 Bruno Court ceased to exist as an independent company having been acquired by Mane, which was established in 1871.



Hand coloured chromolithograph Publisher unknown

Bruno court top right

The Fragonard perfumery was established in 1926 by a former Parisian notary Eugene Fuchs and named after Jean Fragonard, a local painter and son of the 'parfumer' at the court and one of Grasse's most famous sons. The actual factory was established in 1841 by the perfumer Claude Mottet.



Real Photograph Published by Cie des Arts Photomecaniques Paris

Fragonard in foreground

Growing Lavender

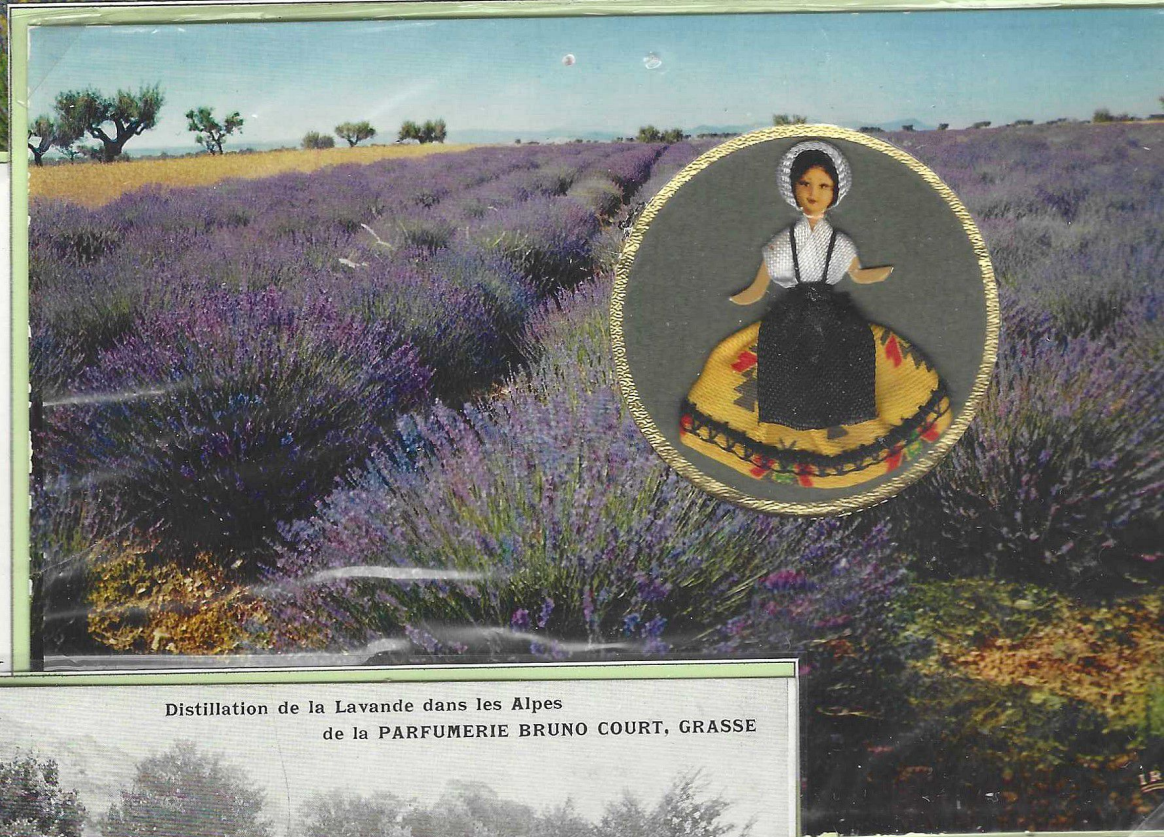


Lavender flowering at its peak about July when the farms around Grasse are awash with the hues of blue and the aromas of fresh lavender. It has been a staple of the perfume industry for centuries.

*Real photograph
Chromolithograph
Published by ARY Chrome
1970*

Lavender can grow in marginal soils and withstand a hot drier summer than many flowers.

*Real photograph
Chromolithograph
Publisher IRIS 1970 Card
has a removable strip on
reverse exposing
lavender perfume.*



Inset. Traditional female dress for Provence.

At first, the distillation of lavender was on a small scale scattered around the hillside properties.



*Distillation de la Lavande dans les Alpes
de la PARFUMERIE BRUNO COURT, GRASSE*

*Real photograph
Lithograph
Publisher unknown
Circa 1900*

Picking Tuberose

Tuberose, a herbaceous perennial was imported from Mexico in the 17th Century because of its fragrance. Queen Marie Antoinette used a perfume, 'Parfum de Trianon' which contained tuberose. The essence can be overpowering and sickly to the wearer. For this reason tuberose is used to give a floral note to a perfume.



Real photograph Publisher J Beunits Circa 1900

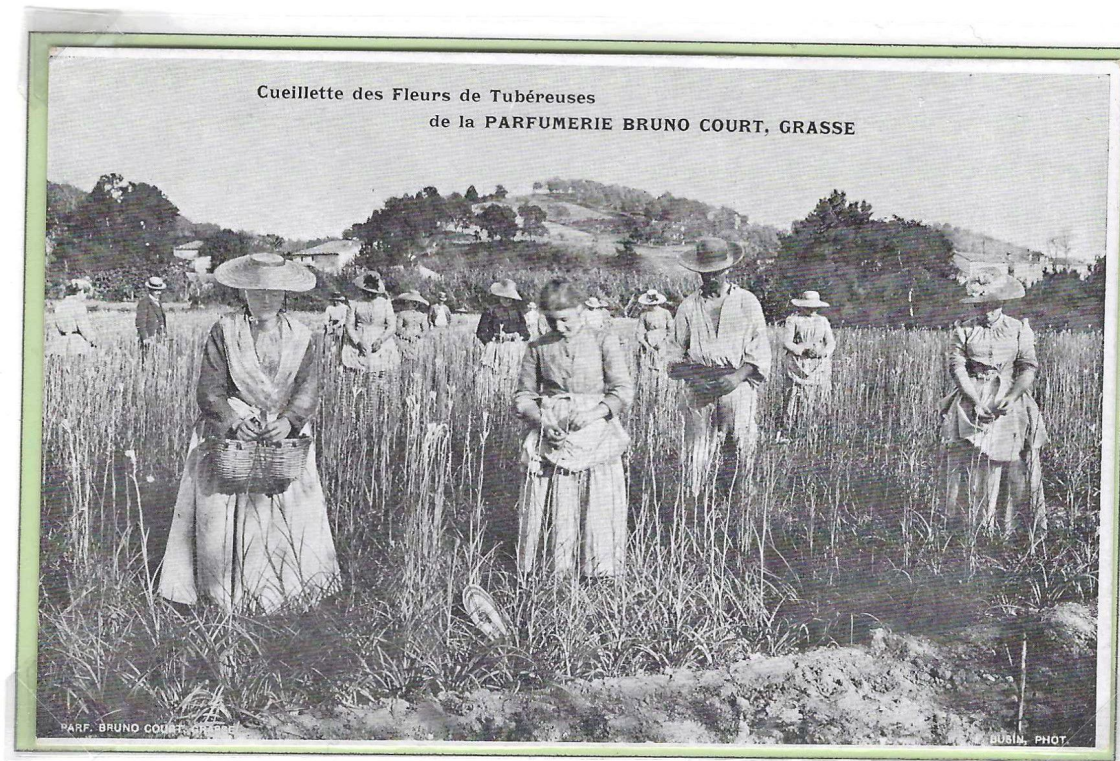
In 1632 Father Pheophile Minuti introduced tuberose to lower Provence. It became so popular that its date of arrival was recorded. Tuberose is grown specifically for the production of perfume.



Hand coloured collotype Publisher Rostan & Munier Nice Circa 1900

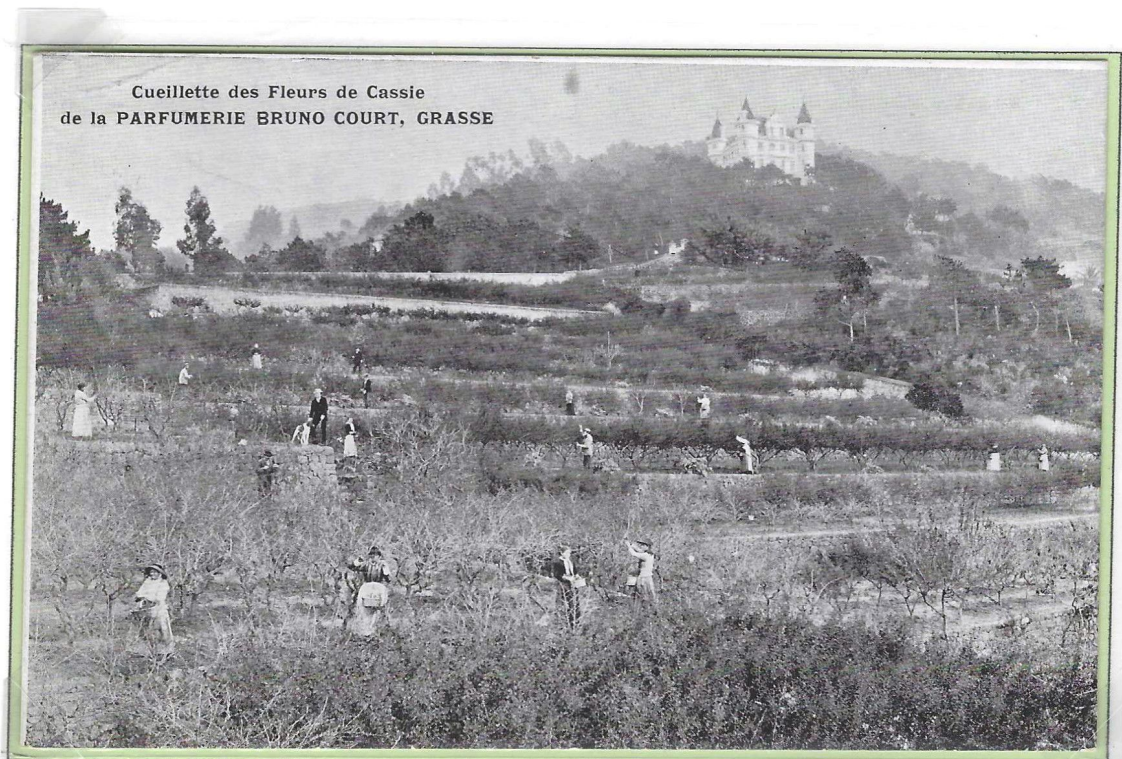
Picking Tuberose and Cassie

From August to November, early morning, before the sun is too hot, men and women gather the delicate newly blooming tuberose flowers and place them in jute bags or baskets. As the tuberose flowers sequentially this process needs to be undertaken daily. It takes 12000 kilos of buds to produce 200gms of absolute.



Real photograph lithograph Photographer F Busin Circa 1900

Cassie is the name given to the flowers of *Acacia farnesiana*, a popular traditional flower for making promades. It is a hardy easy to grow 4 to 9 metre shrub. Flowers contain sesquiterpenoid famesol which is a valued compound that emphasizes the odours of floral perfumes



Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

Collecting Jasmine

Originally from Eurasia, several species became naturalized in the Mediterranean. The mild climate, fertile friable soils suited the cultivation of jasmine. The flowers are picked from August to October and because of their delicate nature they must be picked by hand, as they were more than a century ago.



Collotype Publisher and photographer Jean Giletta Nice Circa 1900

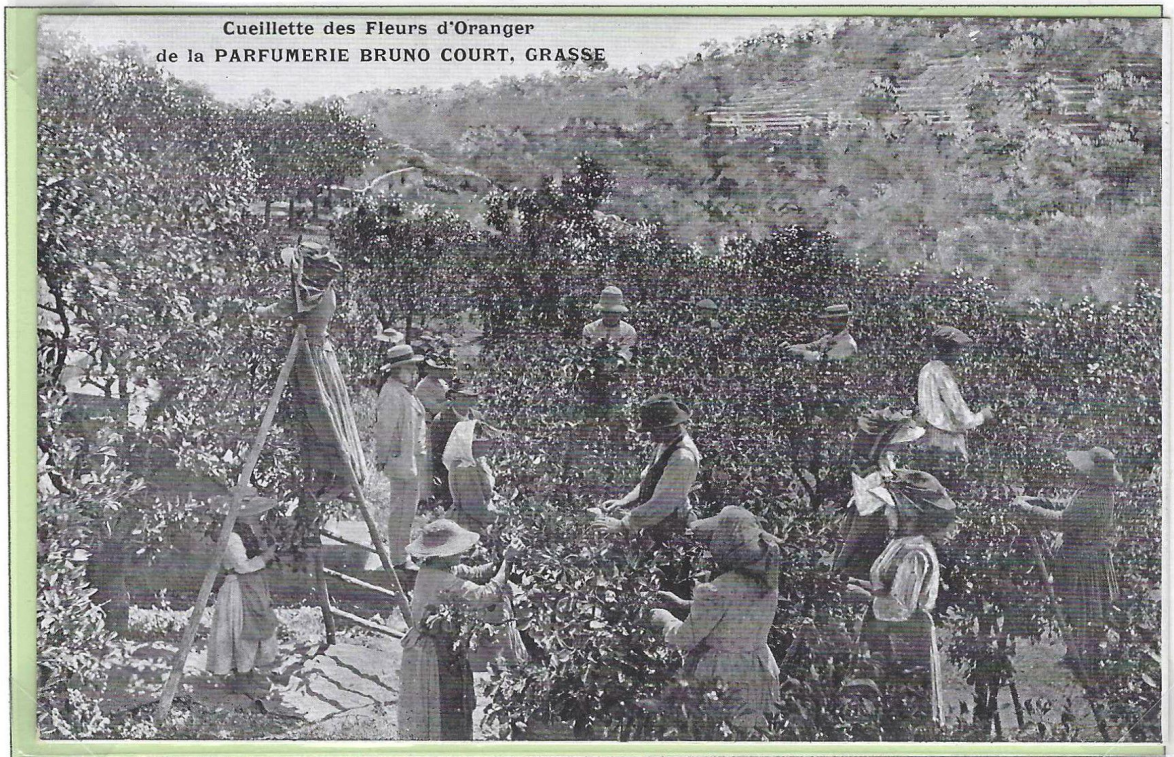
The flowers quickly wilt they must be promptly transported to the processing plant. One thousand jasmine flowers are required to produce 15mls of Chanel #5. It takes one tonne of flowers to extract one kilo of jasmine absolute. Each kilo is worth about 50,000 euros



Collotype Publisher unknown Circa 1910

Gathering the Flowers of Oranges

In the 11th Century the Crusaders introduced oranges to the Provence region. They are the most cultivated fruit tree in the world, but in Provence it is the flower blossom rather than the fruit which is valued for its distinctive floral notes. There are over 600 varieties of oranges.



Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

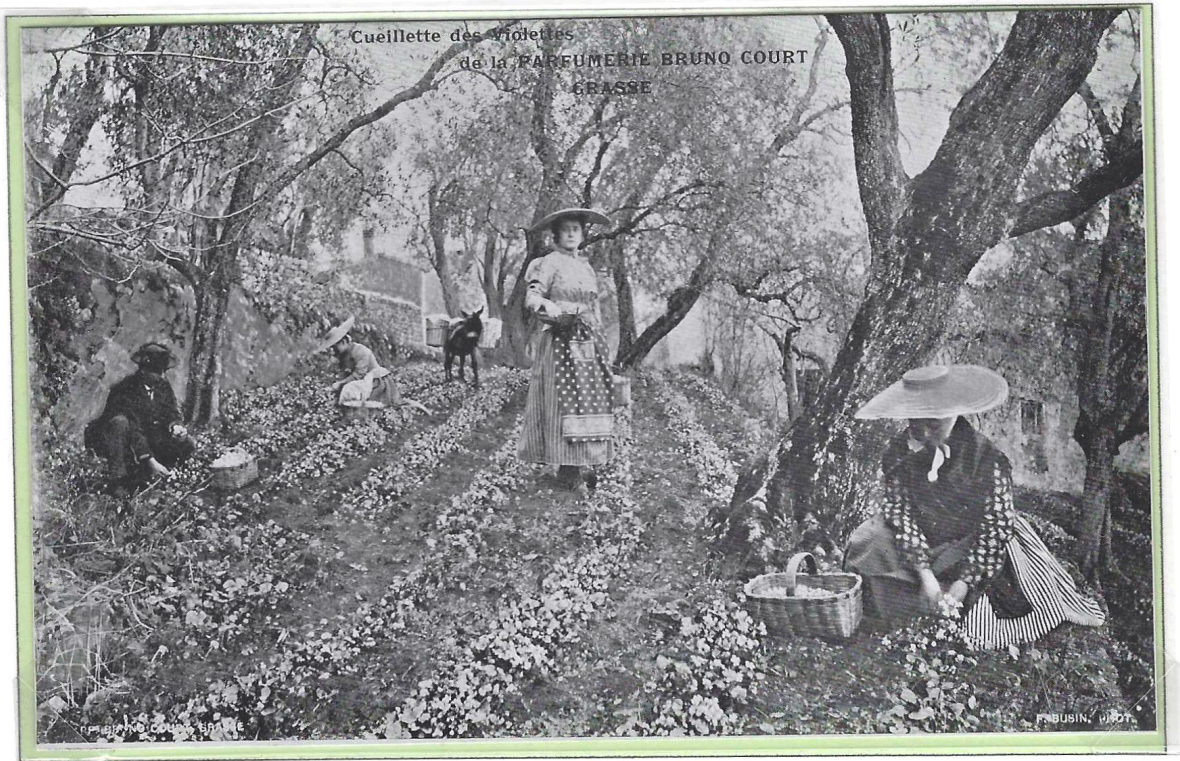
The gathering of flower buds is at its peak at the end of April and the beginning of May. Picking by hand commences at dawn when the flower is its most odorous. The flowers must be just open enough to make them fall to the ground where they are collected by nets. They must be distilled within twenty four hours.



Hand coloured collotype Publisher Rostan & Munier Nice Circa 1900

Harvesting Violets

Both Greeks and Romans had a long tradition of using violets for herbal remedies, wine (vinum violatum), food sweetener and festivals. Violets flourish where there are warm summers and cold winters. The main season for the flowers is from October to March.



Lithograph Photographer F Busin Circa 1900

At the end of March there is the 'Beastide aux Violettes' to mark the end of the violet season when Grasse is bedecked with violets and there is a floral parade through the streets. Most violets are grown on small terraced plots, with the harvesting physically demanding.



Coloured collotype Publisher Rostan & Munier Nice Circa 1900

Plucking Roses

Roses were introduced to the region of Provence by the Romans. Every year, Grasse hosts a five day festival dedicated exclusively to roses. The festival is held in May with the main prize going to the most beautiful and sweet smelling rose.



Collotype Photographer and printer L Levy Fils & Cie Paris Circa 1900

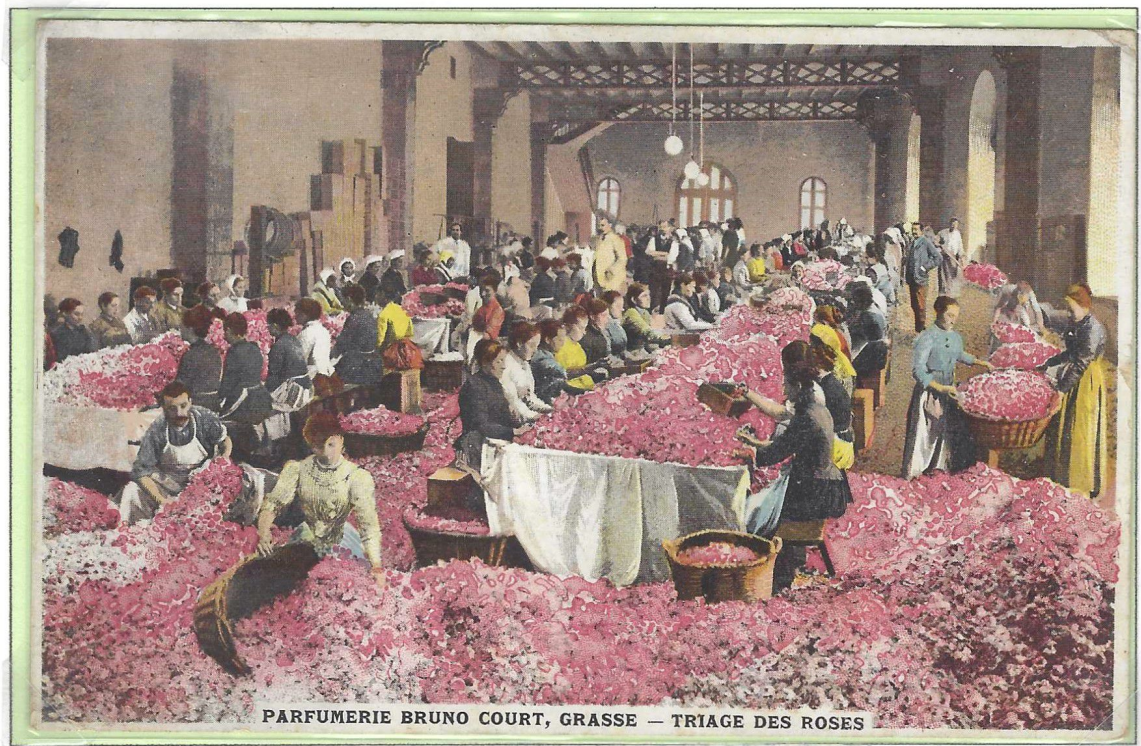
At the end of April or early May, depending on weather patterns, the rose fields fill with women who pluck the flowers, one by one, break the blooms and gently place the petals in their hessian bags or wicker baskets. Work commences at 7:00 and continues until 10:00. At the end of the harvest 2.5 hectares will yield 1.5 tonnes of petals. This will distil into 2.3 litres of absolute rose oil.



Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

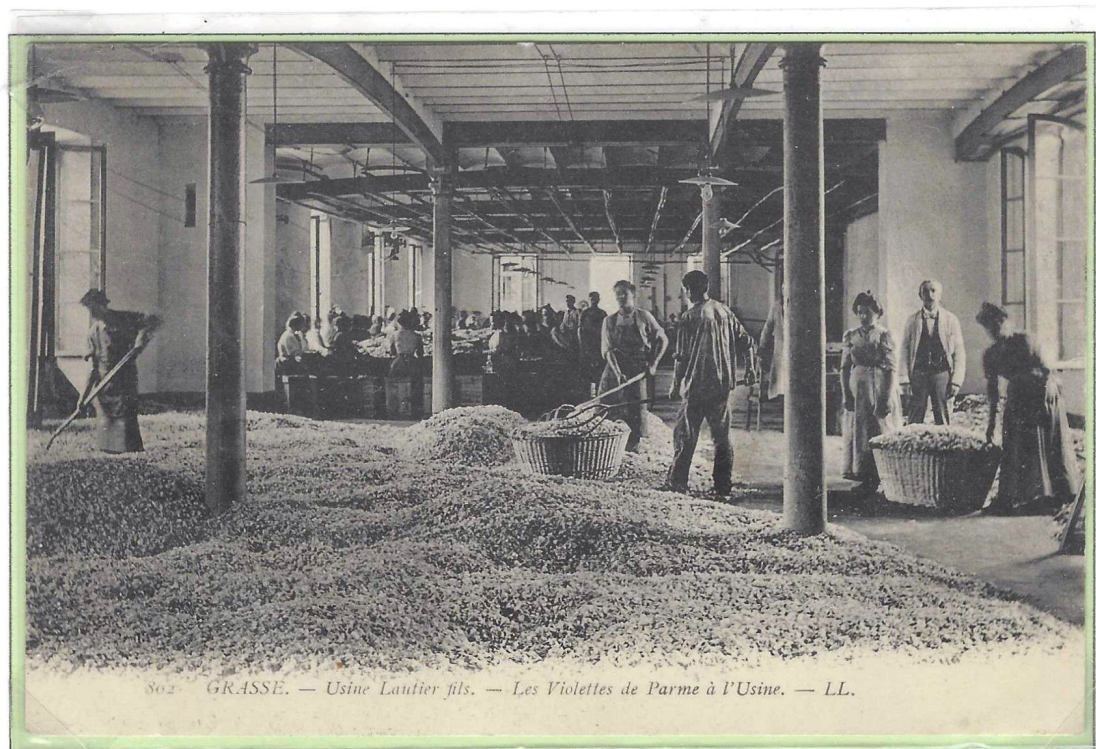
Drying and Sorting of flowers

Most farmers in Grasse do not process their own flowers but after picking they are transported to sheds where they are spread out to 'breathe', raked and then tossed in the air. Once delivered the petals are gathered onto tables and separated from impurities such as leaves and stems.



Hand coloured lithograph Publisher unknown Postally used 21 Apr 1914

Flowers are then placed in baskets (to the right), then taken to bain-maries to extract the oils. From the picking to 'breathing' and sorting is a very labour intensive process.



Real photograph Collotype Publisher Lucien Levy & Sons Paris Circa 1900

Cold enfleurage process

The most basic process for extracting essential oils from flowers is the cold enfleurage process. Large framed glass trays called a 'chassis' are smeared with lard or tallow before petals are placed on the tray.

The petals are regularly replaced until the fats are saturated with oils from the flowers.

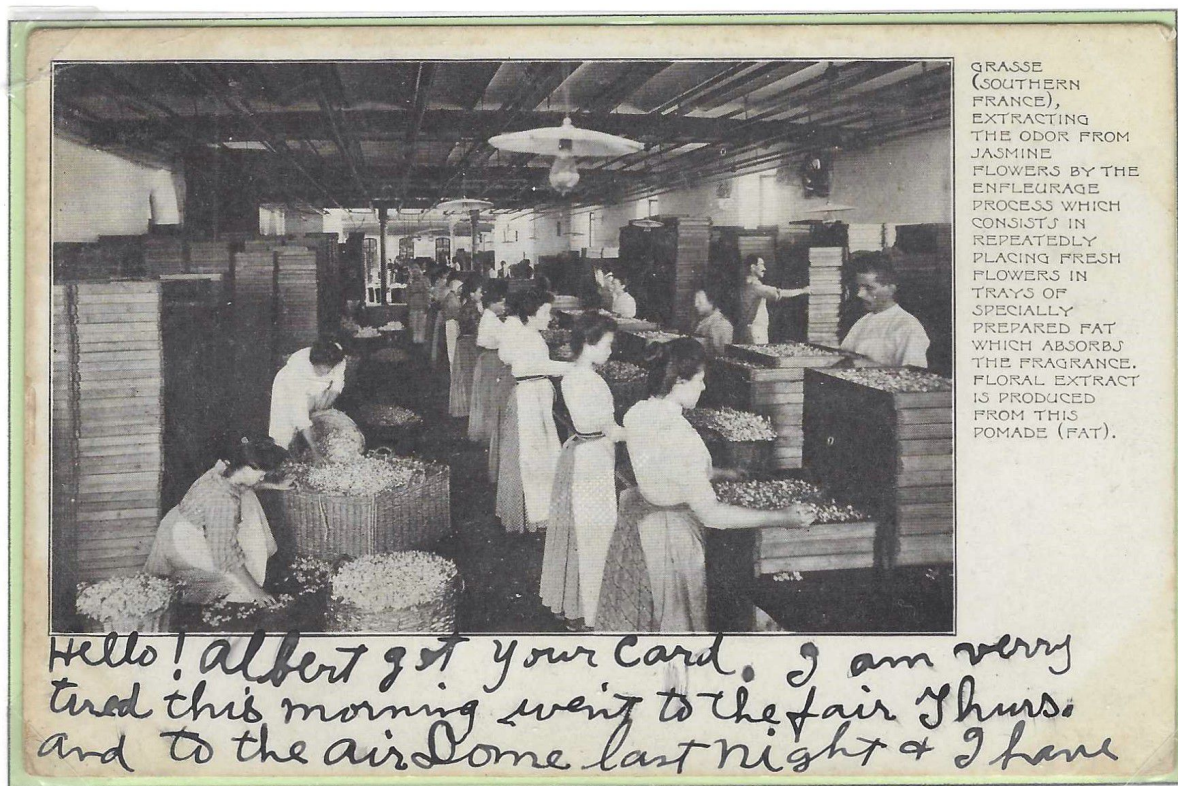


Real photograph Collotype Publisher unknown Circa 1900

The resulting saturated fats are exported as pomades to be used for hair styling or a skin moisturizer.

Called pomades (French) because they were originally fats mixed with mashed apples.

Floral extract is produced from this pomade (fat).



Hello! Albert got your card. I am very tired this morning went to the fair Thurs. and to the air dome last night & I have

Real photograph Lithograph Undivided back Publisher unknown Postally used 29 Aug 1908

Hot enfleurage Process

Hot enfleurage is also called maceration. This technique is used for flowers such as cassius that can withstand heat. Flowers are placed into oil or fat and then heated to between 40 and 60 degrees Celsius. The process takes about two hours during which time the mixture is continuously stirred.



Real photograph Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

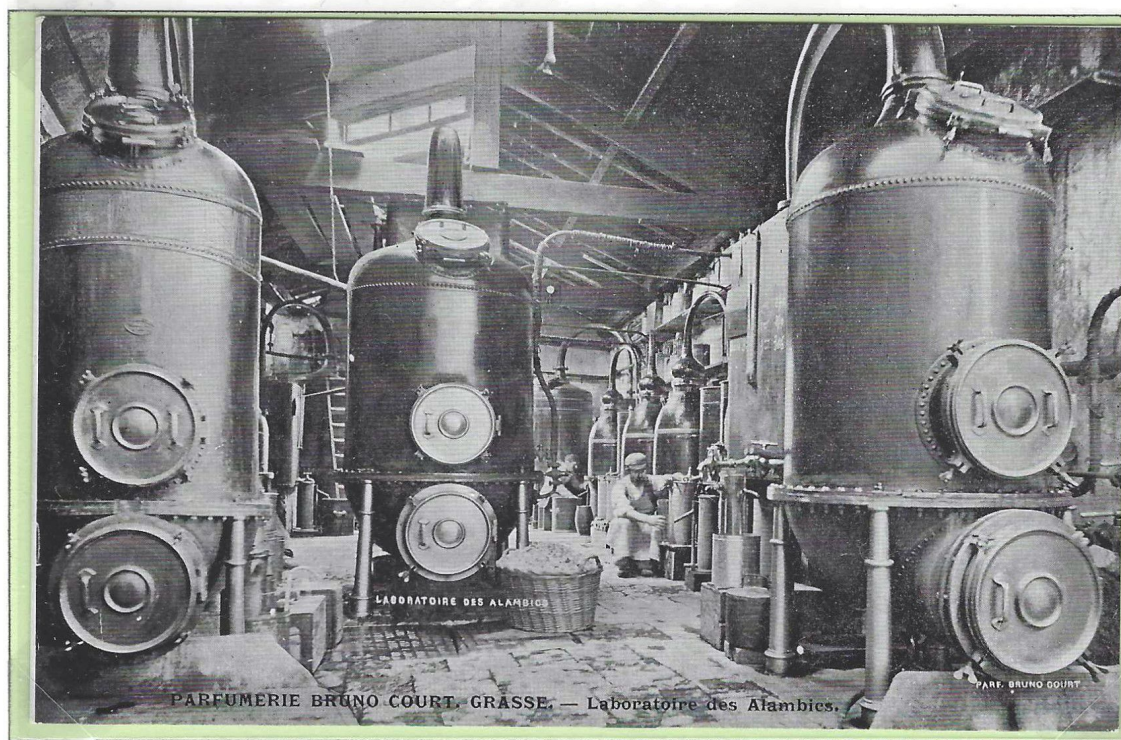
It is the oil or fat that traps the flower's fragrance. The mixture is next filtered to remove flower parts, then washed with alcohol to obtain a product with high perfume content. Hot enfleurage is no longer used because of the time and large volume of flowers required with a resulting small output.



Real photograph Publisher Cie des Arts Photomecaniques Paris Circa 1950

Steam distillation

Distillation is based on the capacity of water vapour to capture essential oils. Petals are placed on perforated trays located in the upper part of a tank, then boiled. Rising vapour is impregnated through the flowers and carries through to a coil where refrigeration allows the vapour to condense.



Real photograph Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

The obtained liquid is a mixture of essential oils (essence) and water which is decanted into a 'vase' called a 'florentine'. The oil remains on the surface. This is the decantation phase. 4,500 kg of rose petals are required to obtain 1kg of 'essence'. This is called 'essential oil'. The oil is then treated with solvents the product called 'pink absolut' in the case of roses. Not all flowers are suitable for this process.



Real photograph Publisher Cie des Arts Photomecaniques Paris Postally used July 1953

Making Absoluts / Packaging

From the essential oil stage further processing using selective boiling and condensation, in the apparatus called 'stills', produces the very concentrated and valuable product known as 'absolut'.

This end product is the essence of high end perfumes.



Real photograph Lithograph Publisher unknown Circa 1900

The final stage of manufacture is the despatching of oils around the world. The drums are packaged in wooden crates and despatched to manufacturers of eau de cologne, perfumes, soaps, candle manufacturers etc.



Real photograph Producer Cie des Arts Photomecaniques. Circa 1950

Perfume Museum/ Eau de Grasse

Nowadays , visiting one of the many museums devoted to an explanation of the history and processes for the manufacture of perfume is almost obligatory, for the tourist to Grasse.



Any journey through the history of making perfume always includes the 11th Century Arabian physician Avicenna who experimented with the distillation of flower essences.



Real photograph by Guy Bouchet Lithograph Publisher Gregoire Gardette Postally used Jan 1996

After a guided tour of one of Grasse' perfume manufacturing establishments then a stroll through the flower market or a visit to the countless Parfumeries, selling their wares, is a time honoured tradition.

Eau de Grasse

GRASSE
STATION CLIMATIQUE
LA VILLE DES FLEURS ET DES PARFUMS

Real photograph Lithograph Producer Les Editions Mar St Andre Circa 1980