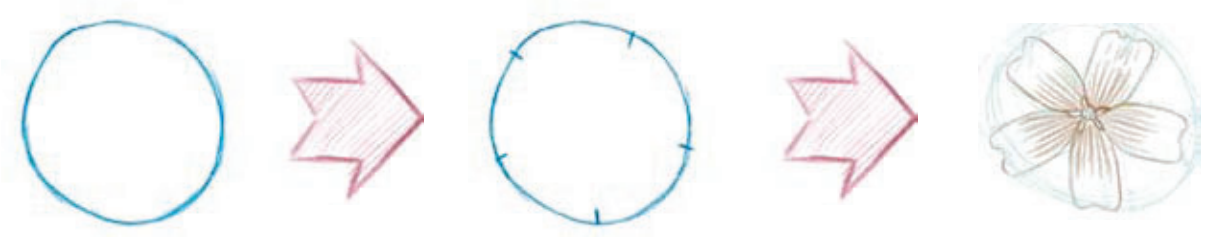
DRAWING PLANTS & FLOWERS

PRACTICE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY TRICK

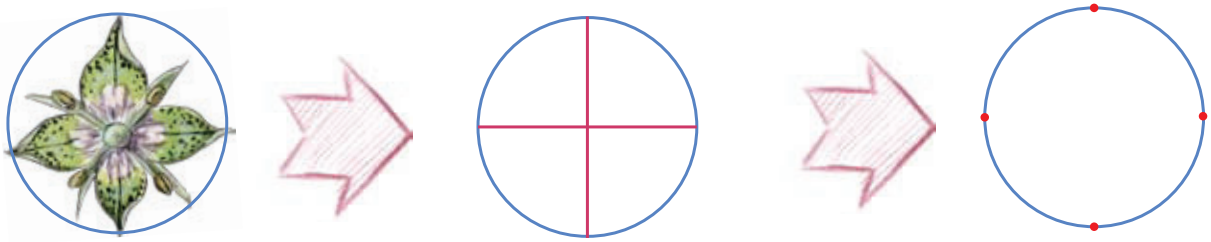
Plants are great subjects to draw. They do not run or fly away and can be observed closely. There are a number of tricks that will help make your own drawing easier and that are easily taught to students. Rather than teach it all at once in a massive drawing lesson, consider breaking it up into mini lessons that you insert between journaling and sketching activities. Pick lessons that will be particularly relevant to what the students are about to work with. There is no right or wrong way to draw. If a specific trick does not work for a student, that is okay, encourage them to absorb what is useful from the lessons. The most important thing is to start drawing on a regular basis. The more you draw the better you get. This is more important than any trick.

HOW TO MASTER FLOWER SYMMETRY

Have you ever had problems placing petals evenly around a flower? Starting with a circle can help. Train yourself to see the circle formed by the edges of the petals. You can also often see circles formed by the parts of the flower in the middle. Draw the flower's circle, then add little tic marks where you see the tip of each petal. If your tic marks are not symmetrical, it is easy to move them around until you get them roughly evenly spaced. Once these are in place you can use them as guides to draw your petals symmetrically. We will use this same system for all the other flowers as well. The trick is to train yourself to look at a complicated shape and to simplify it in your mind. Your eye will be initially drawn to the detail of the flower but ignore it at the start. Make a simple diagram that focuses on the symmetry of the flower, then you can make your detailed drawing, petal by petal, on top of it. Make all of your preliminary lines as light as possible, or work with a non-photo blue pencil for this part of the drawing.



You will usually see flowers with three, four, five, six, or many petals. Getting used to these forms of symmetry and how to quickly place tic marks around the circle helps a lot. This is a great way to review or introduce geometry. Lets take a look at how this works:

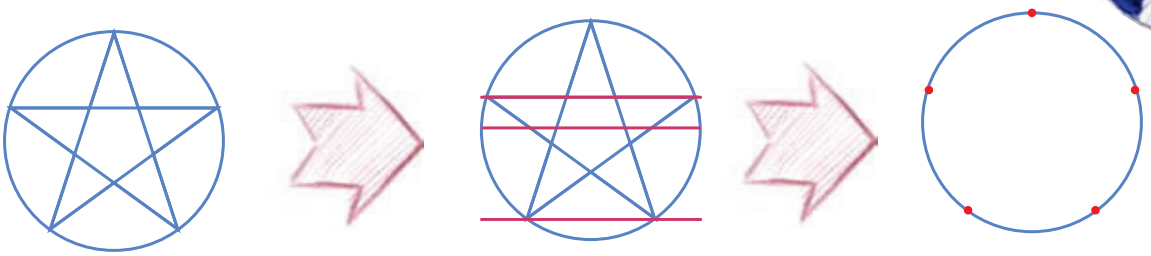


When you see a flower with four petals, visualize the circle that is made by the tips of the petals.

Visualize cross hairs through the middle of the circle. This divides the circle into four equal sections.

Draw small dots or tic marks at those points to guide you in drawing the petals of the flower symmetrically.

Now let's try it with a five-petaled flower. This will be a little more complicated but with a little practice, pentaradial symmetry will become easy to draw.

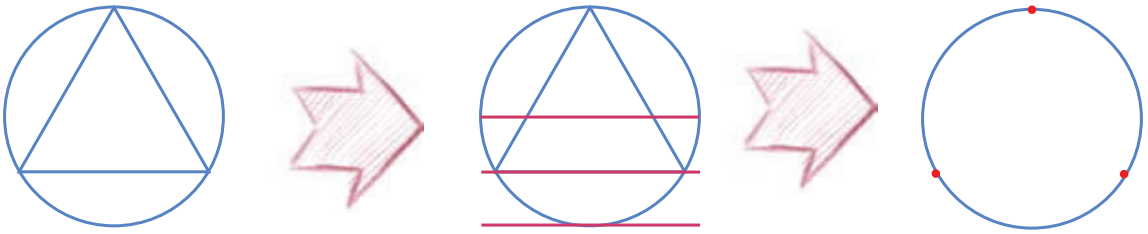


Let's start with the symmetry of a five pointed star. The top point is at the top of the star and directly on the centerline .

The "shoulders" of the star are significantly above the midline. The "feet" of the star are close to the bottom of the star.

With these points in mind, practice drawing a circle and placing five points symmetrically within it. You do not need to try to draw the star, it is just a useful reference point.

What about the symmetry of a flower with three petals?

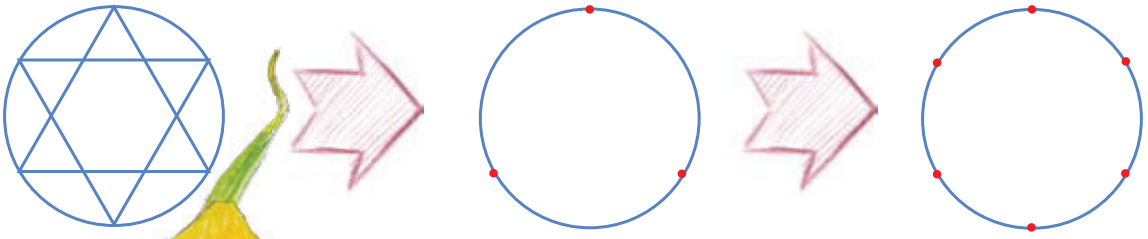


Visualize an equilateral triangle in the middle of a circle. Once again, the middle point is right at the top and directly on the centerline.

The bottom of the triangle is half-way between the bottom of the circle and the midline.

With these points in mind, practice drawing a circle and placing the three points symmetrically. Again, there is no need to draw the triangle, it is just a helpful visualization tool.

If you can do a three-petaled flower, you can do a six-petaled flower. Use the same approach as you did with the three-petaled flower. Just divide the circle into thirds as above, then add a point in the middle of each segment. Each point should now have a match on the opposite side of the circle.



Draw points on the circle, dividing it into three sections as shown above.

Then cut each remaining section in half. Make sure all points are directly across the circle from another point.

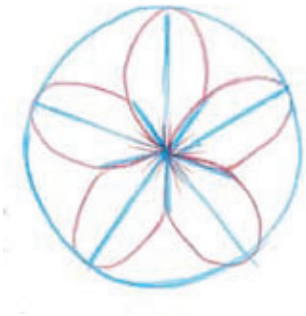
Six-petaled flowers are actually organized in two sets of threes. The top three are technically the petals while the bottom three are the sepals. If you look careful you will see differences in the shape and patterns on these two sets.

BROAD AND NARROW PETALS

Points around the edge of the circle help you draw broad and narrow petals. The trick is to use the points to find the tips of narrow petals and the sides of broad petals.

If the flower has narrow petals, use the points on the circle to locate the tips of each petal.

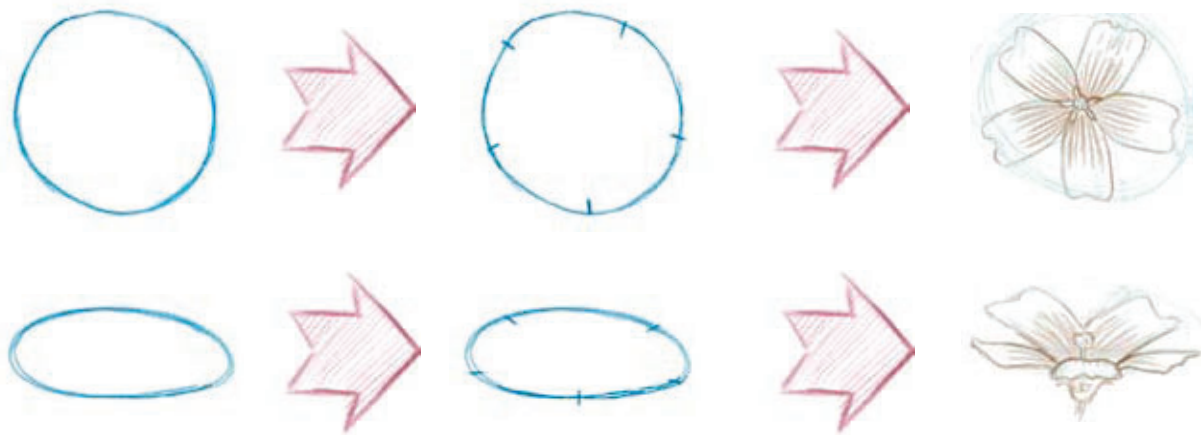
If the flower has broad petals, use the points on the circle to locate the sides between the petals. Here I have drawn a line from the point on the circle to the middle of the flower. This helps in drawing the edges of each petal.



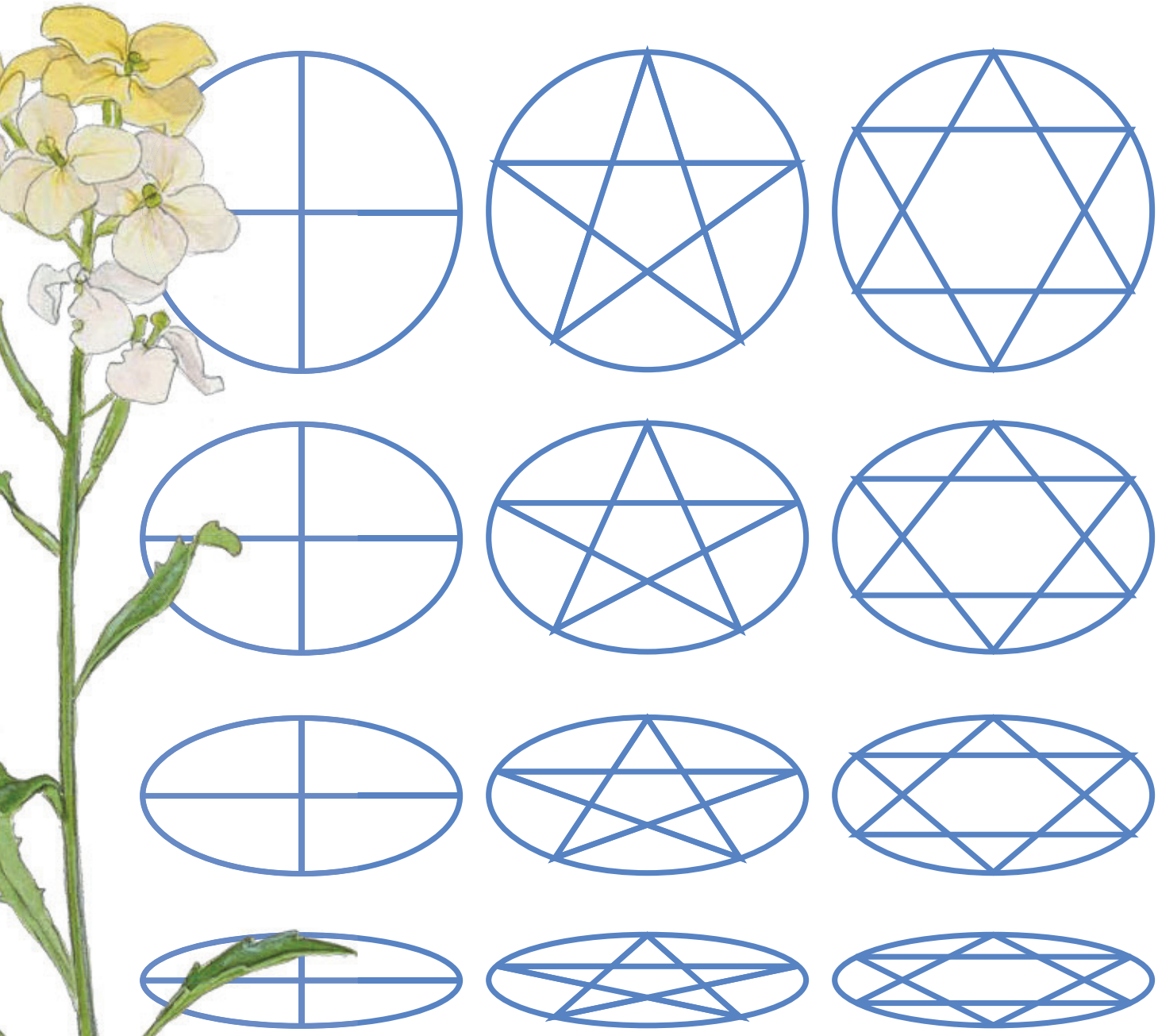
If the petals are intermediate in width, you can use both of these techniques together (finding the tips and the sides of the petals) to help you draw the shape.

FORESHORTENING FLOWERS

If you use a circle to map out the symmetry of flowers, you make it a lot easier to draw the flowers in a foreshortened view. If you foreshorten a circle, you see an ellipse. Similarly, if you foreshorten a flower that is based on a circle, the flower makes an ellipse. Note that the locations of the tips of the petals remains the same in the foreshortened circle.



If you look at the head of a cluster of flowers, you will see blossoms from many different angles. Each flower will be foreshortened to a different degree and be oriented at a different angle. Make a series of ellipses to match the orientation of the individual flowers in the cluster. Flowers in the middle will tend to be seen more head on and have a circular outline. Flowers at the edges will tend to be oriented at an angle to the viewer and have elliptical outlines.



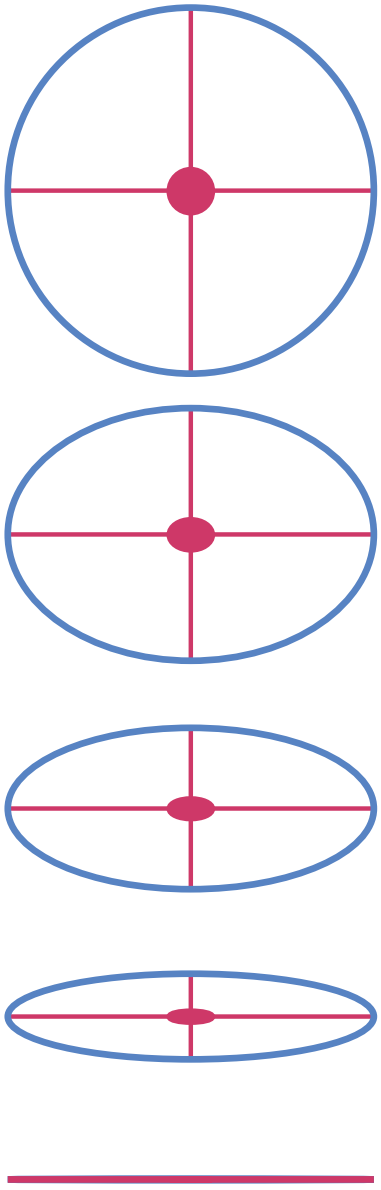
As a circle foreshortens, it becomes an ellipse. Note how the length of the horizontal cross-hairs do not change while the length of the vertical cross hairs shortens.

As you foreshorten a pentagram, the 'shoulders" of the star get skinnier as the star foreshortens. The height of the top section of the star gets shorter but its width does not change. In both of these cases, only the vertical dimension is altered. The height is reduced while the width stays the same.

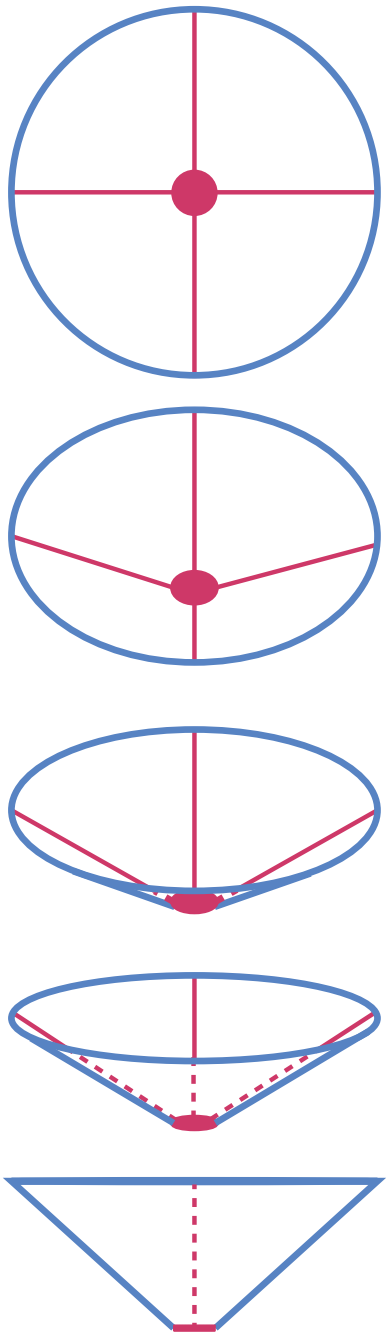
Again you see that it is only the vertical dimension that is altered as the shape foreshortens.

CONE-SHAPED FLOWERS

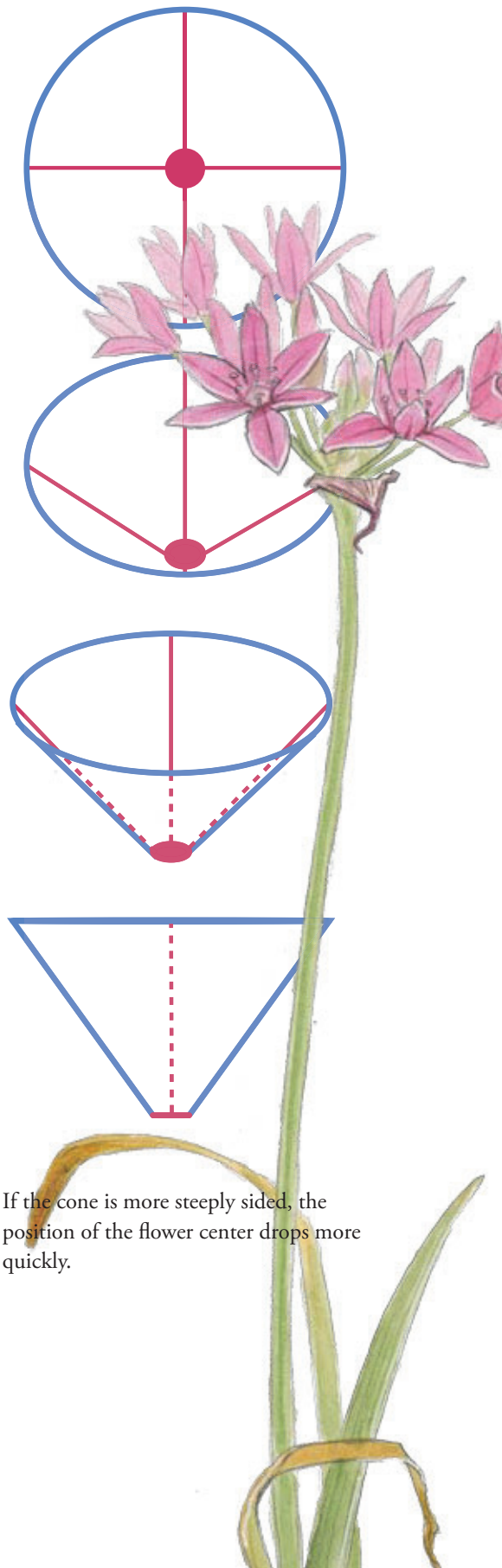
Many flowers are cone-shaped. Such flowers foreshorten differently than flowers whose petals are on the same plane. Compare the location of the center of the flat flower and a cone-shaped flower as the blossom rotates.



As you tilt a flower whose petals are in a flat plane, the circle of the outer petal edges becomes an ellipse. The center of the flower stays in the middle of the flower. The "top" and "bottom" petals appear to get shorter but keep their width while the petals on the sides retain their length but get narrower.



In a cone-shaped flower, the center of the flower drops as the flower rotates. The length of the top petal grows as it is rotated to a position that is perpendicular to the viewing angle. The bottom petal gets shorter. Once the center drops below the lip of the ellipse, the underside of the cone becomes visible.



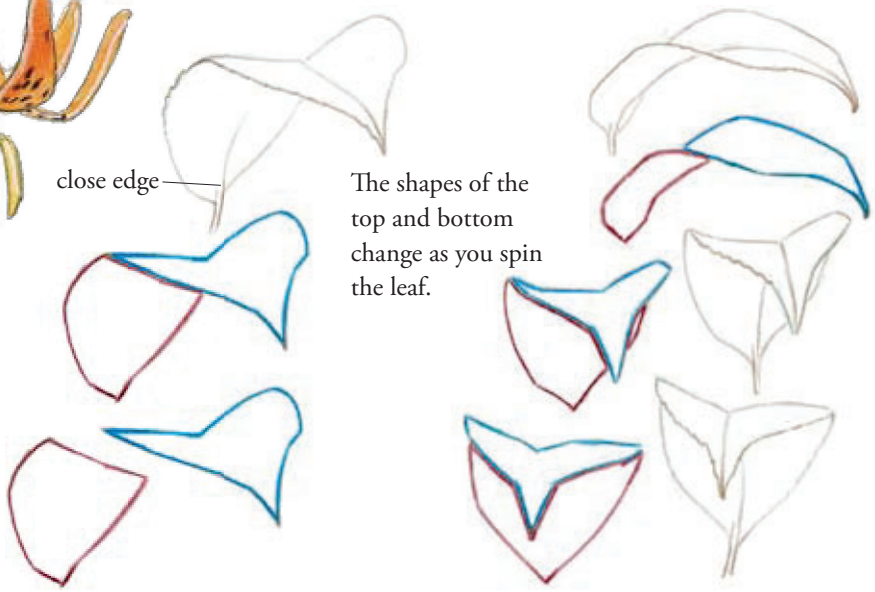
If the cone is more steeply sided, the position of the flower center drops more quickly.

CURLING AND OVERLAPPING PETALS

Petals or leaves that curl and twist are challenging to draw. Try this approach: close one eye to flatten the three dimensional image to two. Think of the top surface a flat shape and draw its edges. Draw the undersides in the same way, using the flattened shape next to that of the top. Train yourself to let go of your thoughts about how the petal should look and record the shape as you really see it. These shapes will not look like petals on their own but put them together and a petal appears.

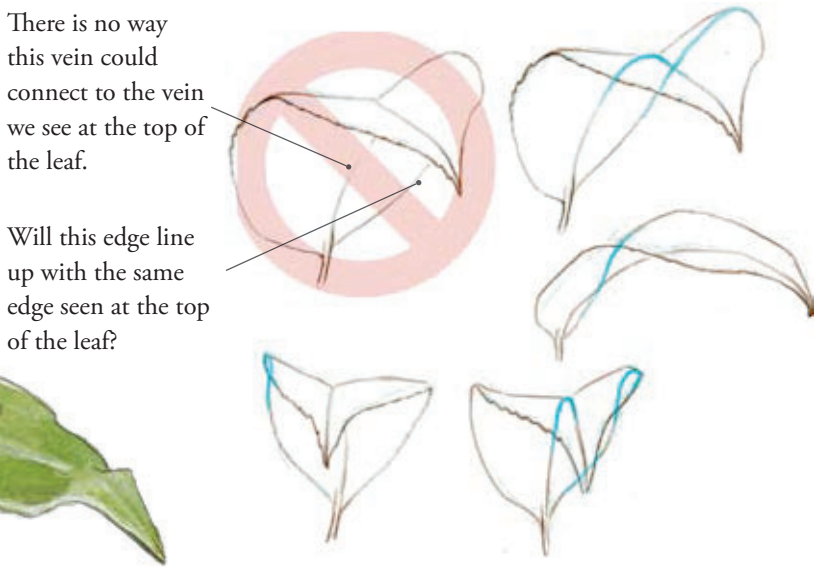
CURLING LEAVES AND PETALS

To draw a complex foreshortened leaf, close one eye (to disrupt your 3D vision) and look at the leaf as two flat shapes that are placed next to each other. Then draw the close edge that unites the two shapes as one continuous line. Draw several practice leaves as an exercise.



SEE THROUGH THE LEAF

To make sure your mid-vein and the far side of the leaf emerge at the right spot, imagine what the curves of those lines do when they are blocked from your sight.



BILATERALLY SYMMETRICAL FLOWERS

Many plants have bilaterally symmetrical flowers that do not fit the three, four, five, six symmetry. They can only be divided into two equal halves along one central axis. These flowers may appear singly or as a part of a complex inflorescence such as lupine (right). When drawing these flowers it helps to keep track of the axis of symmetry to make sure that both sides of the flower will look the same. If you are drawing a flower cluster, start by drawing the flowers that are closest to you (the ones pointing straight toward you). Then add the flowers in progressive layers behind them. This trick of drawing from front to back can also be applied to leaves and other overlapping shapes.

HOW TO SHOW DEPTH

If your leaf or flower looks flat, try strengthening the line's edge that is coming toward you. This will make it pop out from the lines in the back. Also add more detail in the parts that are closer to you, less detail in the background.