

Edible flowers

Edible landscapes combine ornamental flowers with vegetables, fruits and edible flowers.

Floral ingredients such as peppery nasturtiums or tart Calendula add flavor, texture, and color, and transform an ordinary salad into an exciting dish. They:

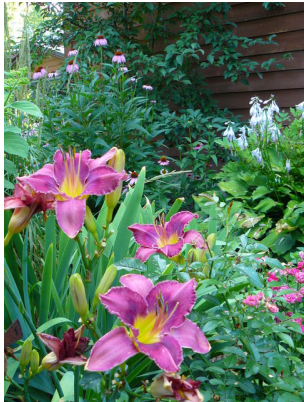
- Flavor and garnish foods.
- Add variety and interest to landscapes.
- Are usually annual flowers, though some may self-seed and regrow next year.
- Provide food and habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects.



Bachelor button flowers (*Centaurea cyanus*)

There is a wide variety of colors, forms and sizes of edible flowers. Many are grown as annuals — plants that complete their life cycle in one growing season — and are easy to grow in garden beds, raised beds and containers.

- Proper planting, site selection and general care will result in healthy plants that bloom throughout the summer.
- Most edible flowers are sun-loving and require 6 to 8 hours of sun per day and will grow in average garden soil or potting soil.
- Common garden insects can usually be managed by routine hand-picking, and washing them off with a garden hose.
- Fencing will protect your plants from small animal feeding.
- Edible flowers are used to garnish foods. However, not all flowers are edible! It is important to choose only flowers that are safe to eat, have not been treated with pesticides, and that go well with the dish you are preparing.



Daylilies in a home garden.



Squash flower (Curcubita spp.)



Alpine strawberry planted in a home garden with sage, geranium and hosta

Choose only safe-to-eat flowers and eat the right part of the plant

Even if one part of the plant is safe to eat, do not assume that all parts are safe. Often only a particular part of the plant is edible. Remove stamens and pistils from flowers and eat only the petals.

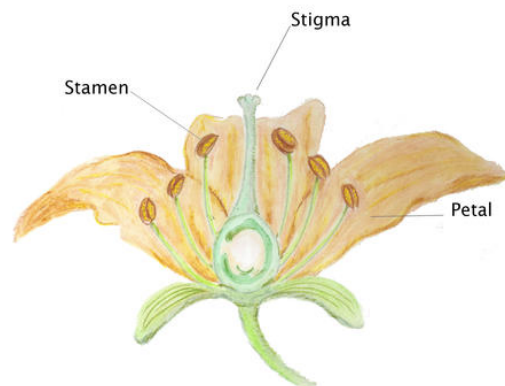
- For instance, the red stalks of rhubarb may be eaten. But you should not eat the green leaves, roots or flowers as they contain toxic compounds.

Some plants naturally create toxins to discourage animal or insect damage, and the same natural chemicals may also injure humans. Research plants for this defense mechanism.

- Never experiment by eating plant parts unless you are sure they are harmless.
- Consult a reliable reference for edible flowers such as the AMA Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants published by the American Medical Association.

Edible flowers are also listed at the end of this page.

Note that like any food, some people may still have sensitivity or reactions to plants deemed safe to eat. Try plants that are new to your palate in small amounts until you see how your body responds.

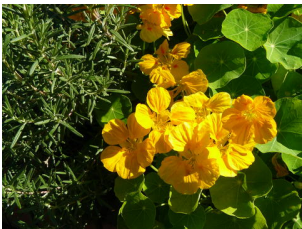


Parts of a flower. For most edible flowers, it is best to just eat the petals.

Select flowers without pesticides

The source of flowers and how the plants have been maintained is important.

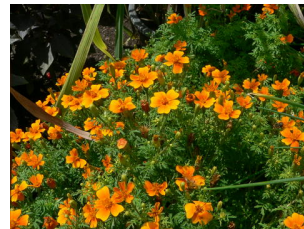
- Be sure the plants are pesticide-free.
 - Contact pesticides are sprayed on plants to kill pests. They remain on the surface of plants.
 - Systemic pesticides are taken up by plant roots and distributed throughout the plant parts to deter insect feeding and damage. They cannot be washed off.
 - Older gardening books may not address chemicals or may just suggest washing the flowers.
 - Talk to your local garden center about edible flowers and tell them you want pesticide-free plants.
- Choose plants labeled as “certified organically grown” or better yet, grow your own flowers from seed.
- Edible flowers sold in the produce department at your local grocery store are specifically grown to be consumed by people and safe to eat.
- Do not eat cut flowers or flowers picked from the roadside.
- Note that plants from garden centers and nurseries may have been treated with fertilizers and pesticides. Flush soil with water. Transplant annual flower plants in your garden, carefully removing as much soil as possible from the rootball. Do not plant in soil that has been treated with pesticides.



Rosemary planted next to ‘Whirlybird Gold’ nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)



Creamy white, sweetly scented flowers of the linden, a popular shade tree (*Tilia spp.*)



‘Orange gem’ signet marigold (*Tagetes signata*)

Choose flowers that taste good

Remember that "edible" does not always mean "palatable." The word "edible" means you may safely consume the flower. Unfortunately, it does not always mean the flavor is appealing. Some flowers such as lavender have a bitter or astringent taste and are best used sparingly as a garnish. The same flower grown in different locations can taste different.



Bumble bee on pink
bee balm (*Monarda
didyma*)



Bees on white flowers
of spicy globe Greek
basil (*Ocimum
basilicum* 'Minimum')
with pink and purple
petunias in the
background



Pink coneflower
planted next to
lavender anise hyssop
(*Agastache
foeniculum*)

Pair flowers with food for complementary flavors

Introduce edible flowers gradually and in small quantities into your diet. When seasoning with edible flowers, taste test and try to match the flavor to the recipe. Sweet or floral-scented blossoms can be used to decorate desserts or garnish cold drinks. Peppery nasturtiums, cucumber-flavored borage, and onion-flavored chive blossoms add interest to salads.

Blossoms should be harvested the day they'll be used; try to pick no more than one day early.

- Wash the fresh flowers gently and set them aside to dry.
- Refrigerate them in plastic sandwich bags until you use them.
- Remove interior flower parts such as stamens and pistils (i.e. squash or tulips). These are tart-tasting in some flowers. The white lower part of petals adjacent to the stem should be removed as it can be bitter.
- When serving flowers fresh, add them to your dish just before serving.

Some popular edible flowers and serving suggestions

Correct plant identification is important. Be sure you are harvesting flowers from the correct plant. When buying plants or seeds, make sure you are purchasing plants with the proper scientific name – this will ensure you are buying the correct plant.

In the following list, the plant's common name is followed by its Latin scientific name in italics and parentheses. The scientific name is comprised of the genus followed by the specific epithet. Together they form the plant species. "Spp." indicates there are various species that apply. The Latin name is the best way to ensure you have the correct species of plant and one that is edible.

- Alpine Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca* var. *vesca*) — Flowers have a strawberry flavor; leaves used in tea.
- Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) — Flowers and leaves have a licorice flavor; used in tea.
- Apple or plum (*Malus spp.*) — Flowers are mild with sweet floral flavor; use candied or as garnish.
- Arugula (*Eruca sativa* or *Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) — Flowers and leaves have a very spicy flavor; use sparingly, leaves become bitter when flowers bloom.
- Bachelor buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*) — Flowers have a delicate spicy-sweet flavor; eaten fresh or dried for tea.
- Basil (*Ocimum spp.*) — Fresh flowers and leaves both have typical basil flavor; different varieties vary in flavor and some have additional flavor such as lemon basil; freeze leaves to retain flavor long-term as dried leaves lose flavor.
- Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) — Flowers have a citrusy, sweet, hot, minty flavor; flower taste may differ by species or cultivar and red flowers are said to have the best flavor.
- Borage (*Borage officinalis*) — Flowers have a cucumber flavor; leaves may also be used, but are hairy.
 - Note: Borage has a diuretic effect in large quantities
- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) — Petals are a slightly bitter saffron substitute; more for color than flavor.
- Chamomile, German (*Matricaria chamomilla*) — Flowers have an apple scent and flavor for tea; use fresh or dried.
- Chamomile, Roman (*Chamaemelum mobile*) — Flowers have an apple scent and flavor for tea; use fresh or dried.
- Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) — Flowers and leaves have onion flavor; float or sprinkle flowers on soups, salads, vegetables.
- Coriander (*Coriander sativum*) — Flower has flavors of anise, cumin, orange, and sage.
- Cuban oregano (*Plectranthus amboinicus*) — Grown primarily for leaves; flowers and leaves have more pungent oregano flavor than Mexican oregano (*Lippia graveolens*).
- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) — Flowers have a honeylike flavor when picked young, but older flowers will have a bitter flavor; use young leaves in salads.
 - Note: Because this plant is normally considered a weed in American landscapes, be sure to harvest plants that have not been treated with or grown in pesticide-treated landscapes.
- Daylily (*Hemerocallis spp.*) — Flower bud flavor compares to green beans and eggplant but open flower flavor is milder; petals used in pancakes, frittatas, dips; dried buds used in Chinese sweet and sour soup; flavor will vary between cultivars.
- Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) — Seeds, foliage, flowers are used in pickling, dips, sauces, fish dishes.

- Elderberry (*Sambucus caerulea*) — Flowers are sweetly flavored and scented; cook into pancake batter or brew into tea; use berries for jelly, jam, wine.
 - Caution: Use cooked flowers and berries only. Always remove all stems, leaves, bark, etc., and cook flowers or berries before consuming. Consuming any part of elderberry raw or berries when red and unripe can cause digestive problems.
- Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) — Flowers taste mildly anise, licorice-flavored.
 - Note: Seeds may cause contact dermatitis.
- Greek oregano (*Origanum heracleoticum*) — Flowers have a spicy, green flavor.
- Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) — Flowers have a mild cranberry/citrus flavor; use to add red color to teas.
- Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) — Conelike flowers - “hops” - are used dried or fresh to brew beer.
- Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*) — Flowers taste similar to tonic water.
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* or *L. officinalis*) — Use sparingly; flowers have a sweet perfumed flavor that can become bitter, astringent; enhances dishes with fragrance; used in ice cream, baked goods, herbes de Provence, teas, lemonade.
- Lemon (*Citrus limon*) — Flowers taste citrusy and sweet.
- Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) — Leaves and flowers are mildly lemon-scented.
- Lemon verbena (*Aloysia citriodora*) — Flowers and leaves used dried for tea, flavoring lemon syrup.
- Lilac (*Syringa spp.*) — Flower flavors vary depending on cultivar from no flavor to a green flavor to a true floral lilac flavor; use flowers in ice cream, soft cheeses, pastries.
- Linden (*Tilia spp.*) — Flowers have a sweet, honey-like flavor and fragrance.
- Mexican oregano (*Lippia graveolens*) — Grown primarily for leaves, but flowers can also be added fresh or dried to evoke a milder oregano flavor in Mexican or Italian food.
- Mint (*Mentha spp.*) — Flowers and leaves have minty flavor; use in teas, fruit salad, cocktails, sauces, chutneys.
- Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) — Both flowers and leaves have a peppery taste; use fresh in salads for a spicy flavor.
- Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) — Grown primarily for leaves; flowers and leaves have a light minty flavor with thyme overtones.
- Pansy (*Viola spp.*) — Flowers have a grassy, green flavor.
 - Note: Dark-colored flowers may make your tongue dark temporarily.
- Pea (*Pisum sativum*) — Flowers have a floral, pealike flavor; use fresh in salads.
- Pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*) — Flowers are sweet with fruity, mint flavor with a little spiciness.
- Pinks (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) — Flowers have a sweet clove flavor; remove the base of the petal (usually white in color) as it is usually bitter; use in sorbets, cold drinks, salads with fruit.
- Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) — Flowers are sweet; good brewed as a tea or fresh in limited quantities.
 - Note: Flowers are not easily digestible, so use in moderation.

- Rose (*Rosa rugosa alba*, *R. rugosa*, *R. damascena*, *R. gallica*) — Use petals but remove the white base of the petal as it's bitter; use rose hips (seed heads) for tea and vinaigrette.
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) — Flowers have more mild flavor than leaves; sprinkle on salads, pasta, poultry-based soups.
- Sage (*Salvia elegans*) — Use flowers and leaves fresh or dried sprinkled on pasta, salads, poultry.
- Scarlet Runner Beans (*Phaseolus coccineus*) — Make use of young pods as well as flowers.
- Scented geraniums (*Pelargonium spp.*) — Flower flavors vary depending on variety (rose, orange, mint, etc.); flowers and leaves are used to flavor jellies, sugar, butter, cakes, tea, honey.
- Signet marigold (*Tagetes signata*) — Flower petals taste like spicy tarragon.
 - Caution: May be harmful in large amounts. Eat occasionally and in moderation.
- Squash (*Curcubita spp.*) — Flowers can be stuffed with cheeses or fried.
 - Note: Remove flower parts (stamens and pistil) before using.
- Sweet marjoram (*Marjorana hortensis*) — Flowers and leaves have a warm spicy flavor.
- Sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) — Tiny white flowers have a sweet, vanilla flavor; dried leaves smell like newly mown hay. Caution: Has a blood-thinning effect. Do not consume if taking blood-thinning medications.
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) — Flowers have the same but milder flavor than leaves.
- Tuberous begonia (*Begonia x tuberhybrida*) — Flower petals have a tangy citrus flavor.
- Tulip (*Tulipa spp.*) — Flower petals have a pea or bean flavor; remove from stem and use in salads, with soft cheeses.
- Yucca (*Yucca spp.*) — Flowers are sauteed, boiled, roasted, dried and lightly seasoned or used to thicken soups, added to salads, and used as garnishes.

Sources

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