



Incredible Edible ... Flowers!  
by Bobbie McCaffrey  
UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Imagine the first hint of spring: The winter air has lost its bite, and you may catch the call of a returning red-winged blackbird or glimpse a pansy, its delicate petals unfurling like banners to welcome the change in the seasons. It inspires a buoyant, hopeful feeling, one enhanced by the knowledge that gardens soon will be growing and flowers will be abundant, including edible ones!

The eating of flowers is not new. Humans have consumed them since the Stone Age, for both medicinal and culinary purposes. Flower buds and petals have been used by many cultures in teas, soups, salads, stir-fries, and liqueurs. Today flowers are used in savory foods and baked goods, ground into sugar for flavoring, made into syrups, preserved in jams, jellies, and honey, and crystallized and used as decoration. Lilacs, roses, violets, squash blossoms and many others can be part of the decorative, edible larder.

Edible flowers come in a wide variety of colors, shapes, and sizes and are found among annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. The flowers of herb plants are edible and can be used as garnishes; many have the same flavor as their leaves. To learn more, see:

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/choosing-and-using-edible-flowers-ag-790>.

Not all flowers are edible, of course. Never eat any flower that you do not know *for a fact* to be non-toxic. When identifying flowers as edible, be sure the reference contains a photo or a good description, which should include which portions of the plant are edible as well as the scientific name (genus and species). Common names can be misleading; for example, the violet (*Viola*

3/24/2021

*odorata*) and the African violet (*Saintpaulia spp\**) are both called “violet,” but the first one is edible and the other not. And of course, as when trying any new food, be alert to any signs of allergies.

Only eat flowers that have been grown without the use of pesticides. Before using, wash and remove the interior parts, such as the stamens, which contain pollen, and the pistils. These may cause allergic reactions and distract from the flavor.

The following are a few flower varieties that are easy to find and use:

- Lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) has an instantly recognizable floral aroma. The lemony flavor combines well with baked goods and teas. Be sure to remove the bitter green or brown bits of the stem.
- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) is often referred to as poor man’s saffron, since its coloring potential resembles that of saffron. It adds a subtle, tangy flavor and a delicate yellow hue to rice and grains. Fresh petals are good in salads and soups.
- Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) has a distinctly peppery tang that goes nicely in salads.
- Pansy (*Viola wittrockiana*), with its color and velvety texture, can add visual charm to a dish. These qualities, and its slightly sweet, lettuce-like flavor make pansies great as a garnish in salads or cocktails, or for candying.
- Rose (*Rosa spp\**) petals range in flavor from sweet to bitter, depending on their color. Red petals have a mineral flavor, while lighter colors are more delicate in taste. Roses are good in jams, syrups, and teas.

Increasingly, people look at the eating of flowers in a totally different light today from in the past, realizing that flowers can be admired not only for their beauty and their scent, but for their taste, as well. The range of flavors, textures, shapes, and colors of edible flowers can add a special something to recipes both savory and sweet. Have fun experimenting, and bon appetit! (For recipe ideas see *The Edible Flower Garden*, Rosalind Creasy, PeriPlus, 1999.)

\*“Spp” indicates more than one species of this genus are being referred to.

Until we are able to conduct in-person classes, Master Gardeners continue to provide online learning opportunities. On April 3, 2021 from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM, join us for a free online class on composting. Please register in advance here:

<https://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=32835>

*Due to the pandemic, Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future continue to be limited. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we are doing our best to provide virtual learning opportunities. You can find our new online class schedule at:*

[http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public\\_Education\\_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698), and recorded classes on many gardening topics here:  
[https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/Public\\_Education\\_Classes/Handouts - Presentations/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Public_Education_Classes/Handouts_-_Presentations/).

3/24/2021

*The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open on Fridays and Saturdays from 9 AM -12 noon April – October. (Closed April 16 and 17). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the number of people allowed in the garden at one time is limited to 10, and masks and distancing are required. Please check our website for more details*

*[https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/Demonstration\\_Garden/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Demonstration_Garden/)*

*Save the date for our annual plant sale, April 17! This event was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, but we're committed to having a sale this year and more dates may be added. Please check our website in late March to see [how you can shop our sale: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu)*

*Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: [mgeldorado.ucanr.edu](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu). We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.*

*For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news).*